

CRUMBS


GATHERED IN THE EAST



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GATEWAY OF OLD FORT.

CRUMBS

GATHERED IN
THE EAST

By

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LONDON

THE NEW CENTURY PRESS, LIMITED

434. STRAND, W.C

1900

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NOTE

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G. D.

PART I
INDIA

CRUMBS

Part I—INDIA

NOUGHT BUT A WOMAN

THE sound of vehicles, conveying their tired owners to their homes from a dance in the Club rooms, awoke the echoes of the silent and deserted roads in the cantonments of Peshawar, and a dogcart, containing three persons, drew up under the portico of a house in one of those branching off the mall, from which a girlish figure alighted, and ran up the steps before the door.

“Good-night, Mrs. Conolly. Thank you so much for taking me. I have enjoyed myself immensely.”

She watched the carriage with its occupants turn out from the compound, and then, with a word or two to the old *chokidar* (watchman) who was mounting guard over the establishment, she passed into the passage, and stood motionless for a moment before the screen-door of a room on the right, listening to hear whether her father had been awakened by the sound of wheels. All was still,

so she turned into her own apartment on the left, where an old native woman rose from the floor to greet her, as she advanced to the dressing-table, drawing off her gloves.

“Oh, ayah, I’m so tired. But it was such a jolly dance. Never mind about my things, you can put them away in the morning. I want to go to sleep now.”

But as soon as the woman had retired, her weariness seemed to disappear. She flung a wrapper over her thinner garment, and stepped on to the verandah, gazing out over the moonlit garden, which seemed like a fairy picture outspread before her.

Avice Milner had heard that night the old, old story, so sweet, so thrilling, so delightful to every maiden’s ear, when she realizes for the first time in her existence that she loves, and is loved by, the one man in all the world for her. She stood there lost in thought, recalling his every word and gesture, seeing again the look in his eyes as he bent over her, feeling once more the touch of his lips as they met hers in that one long kiss which seemed the promise of such happiness to come. He had told her plainly he was only a poor subaltern with nothing but his pay, and many debts, which he was hoping his father would settle for him some day or other ; but meanwhile, they could not hope to marry. They might be separated—how could she bear that? Ah well ! she would not think of it. He loved her, he loved her—that was enough. So long she stood there, till the moon sank down, and

suddenly a rosy flush began to tip the snow-clad mountains in the distance. Then she started ; it was the dawn of day, and ayah would come soon and catch her, if she did not make some pretence of having been to rest. And so, reluctantly, she lay down, still dwelling on her happy thoughts, and with a smile on her lips she fell asleep.

Avice's mother had died in giving her birth, leaving her husband with a hopeless grief and this tiny daughter to be his consolation. But at the moment, he would not accept the comfort thus offered him, and could not bear to see the child, who reminded him too painfully of his loss ; so she was sent home under the care of the ayah who had nursed his wife in her last illness, to be brought up in England ; but when she had attained the age of eighteen, her guardian died, which necessitated her going back to her father in India. He had lived a quiet life, devoting his time and thought to his official duties, and spending his evenings chiefly playing a rubber of whist at the club, before returning to his solitary bungalow. He could hardly realize what it would be to have a young and pretty woman suddenly thrust upon his care ; but from the moment that he saw his daughter, tall and fair and gentle-looking, with dark-blue eyes so like her mother's, his heart went out to her, and his life-long sorrow seemed to fade away.

Avice had spent two years in India. During that time she had been dependent on the kind offices of her lady friends as escort to the different entertainments in the place, or to the hills in summer.

Her father was not to be dragged out of his shell, and would go nowhere ; but a pretty girl is always in request in these Eastern stations, and Avice was considered nice as well as pretty. So she had been out a great deal, and had received plenty of attention, but hitherto her affections had been absorbed in caring for her father. She would ride, dance, and play tennis indiscriminately with anyone of the many who asked her ; but as soon as a man began to expect any special preference, she seemed to turn away from him at once, till Hugh Harlake came upon the scene. They had so much in common. He was tall, too, a comfortable height to dance with, she said to herself, and their steps went well together. And he liked the same books as she did, good healthy stories with lots of adventure, which they could discuss without—well, “some books one reads, but one can’t discuss them afterwards,” she had said to her friend, Mrs. Conolly. And so the friendship had ripened till, without knowing it, she had found herself on the borderland of love ; and this night with one swift step she had crossed the boundary, and stood in a new territory, full of wonderful hopes and fears, and joys and sorrows. What would her father say? That was her first thought as she opened her eyes next morning, and remembered she must tell him all about it soon.

He seldom came in to tiffin, and as she was too late for breakfast, she ate a solitary meal at mid-day, and after her usual afternoon siesta, she called to the syce for her pony, and was just about to start, when a note was put into her hand. Her

heart beat faster as she recognised the writing. It was her first love letter.

“So sorry, darling, I can’t meet you as I promised at five p.m. Am ordered off to Jumrood Fort for a month. Hard lines, isn’t it? Just as you had made me so happy. But I’ll come in as soon as I can get leave for a day, and I promise you I will do my best to make up for lost time. Can’t see your father this evening, as I said I would. What shall I do? Wait till I come in, or write? Or will you tell him? I can hardly believe that it is all right, and that you are mine, really my own. Dearest, send me a line by bearer to say you haven’t changed your mind since we parted last night. I’d say send me something else too, but I don’t care for kisses on paper. Never mind, I’ll take what you owe me with interest when we meet, which I hope will be in a few days time.

Yours ever, HUGH.”

A shadow had crept over her face as she read. So he had gone, left her already. How unexpectedly the disappointment had come ; But after all—in a few days, he said.

She dismounted, and re-entering the house went to a table and hastily scribbled a few lines. She hesitated as she took up the pen. How should she begin her note? “Dear Hugh”—that was too cold—he called her “Darling.” Should she write “Dearest”? No, that would not do ; she did not sufficiently realize his nearness to her yet. At last she began without any prefix.

“Don’t write to father ; I will tell him first, and

you can talk to him about it when you come. Let it be soon. I have not changed my mind, nor shall I do so. Ever yours, A."

Looking at the cantonments of Peshawar from a bird's-eye point of view, it is like a large wheel, from the centre of which the various roads, like spokes, diverge towards the circular one that surrounds and terminates all the rest. On this circular road sentries are posted at comparatively short distances, to guard against surprises from the frontier tribes, and no European is supposed to traverse it after sunset, as murder and theft are only too frequent occurrences there. Ten miles away, where the mountains, towering one above another, seem to touch the sky, is the celebrated Kyber Pass, at the entrance of which stands the mud-built Jumrood Fort. The country between this fort and Peshawar is desolate and drear; two large barren plains, with a few native huts dotted about them, stretch away on each side of the road, which follows the dry bed of a river, along which rough stones and boulders are strewn; and as it nears the cantonments the prospect is equally depressing, as the cemetery lies on either side of it, a continual reminder of those of our fellows who have passed away in this far-off land.

Along this road, over which Hugh Harlake with his company had marched the evening before, a solitary figure was slowly making its way. The man was enveloped in a large blanket, which was fastened with a wooden pin on one shoulder, and

below it he wore a loose blue garment of some thin material, caught in by a stout leather belt round the waist, through which were stuck some formidable looking knives and a couple of pistols. He was a tall powerful-looking native, with features handsome but for a scowl which darkened them. His eyes were black and had a fierce hungry look in them. His name was Shere Ahmed Khan, and he carried beneath the wisp of blue calico that covered him an unsigned death-warrant. His uncle and his son had fallen in a tribal skirmish with the English, and he had sworn by the Holy Prophet that two white men's lives should pay the forfeit. He would wait and watch his opportunity, but his vengeance should be fully satisfied before he turned his face towards the hills again.

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Three weeks had passed since Avice Milner stood on her verandah, "lost in maiden meditation," but not "fancy free." Now she is standing there once more ; but her expression is troubled, as her eyes travel towards the direction of the Jumrood Fort. At breakfast, her father had told her that the Government was rather anxious ; there were rumours of an outbreak, an attack of some sort, they don't know what ; but they must be ready at a moment's notice. A signal of three guns fired in succession in the night was to be a summons for all the women in the cantonments to go at once, and as speedily as possible, to the fort. Her pony was saddled night and day, with loosened girths, ready to mount and ride off

immediately in case of emergency. There was an uneasy tone prevailing throughout the whole community, but Avice had not yet known danger, and was not afraid. It was not this that troubled her. More than a week had passed since her lover got leave to come into cantonments to see her, and to-day a report had reached her through her ayah (native servants always know everything) that the Sahib at Jumrood was ill with fever, and for that reason could not come. She has had some experience of Peshawar fever, and knows the peril of it. She has seen more than one young fellow, in the hey day of youth, talking and laughing one week, and within the following one, carried out and laid to rest in that cemetery towards which, for a second, her eye turns; then quickly her glance recoils, as she looks away, shuddering. She pictures Hugh lying there alone, parched with thirst, burnt up with the flame devouring his life-blood, perhaps helpless and delirious. She cannot endure the thought; she must know the best or the worst. But how to know? Why not go? Ten miles out—but with her pony she could do it and be back in time for dinner. It was a little dangerous perhaps; the road was lonely, and her father's words were still fresh in her mind. He certainly would have prevented her doing anything so rash; she must not let him know of it, but still—yes, she would go. For aught she knew, Hugh might be dying. She caught her breath, and drew her hand across her eyes, as though to wipe away the dreadful thought, then called to her syce to get ready her

pony, and the next minute she had thrown on her riding-habit.

How far it was, how long the ten miles seemed, how hot and dusty! How dreary the country looked, and how solitary it was. Not a soul met her as she rode along; she felt as though even a low-caste coolie would have been a grateful sight. At last the big wooden gates into the fort swung open to admit her; she had arrived at her destination. She found to her consternation that Hugh had ridden into Peshawar that very afternoon. She could not tell how she had missed him, but he must have entered the city just at the time that she was starting, and had been actually in cantonments when she left; otherwise she must have met him. There was nothing for it now but to wait awhile and rest her pony before starting homewards. As Hugh was the only officer on duty, he was bound to return to Jumrood Fort that night, and consequently she would be sure to meet him somewhere on the road.

Avice was a good rider, and she knew her pony's powers well, but her spirits sank somewhat as the light began to fail rapidly, just when she was about five miles on her homeward way. She urged her willing little animal on with voice and rein, until, as the darkness grew around her, she was obliged to draw up and go more slowly, for fear of turning off the track. At last the white gravestones (for once a welcome sight) showed a glimmer on each side of her, and she knew that a few yards further on would find her in the circular road, and, there-

fore, quite near home. To reach it she had to cross a narrow bridge, the outline of which she saw in front of her. As she came up to it, her pony started and swerved aside from something resting on the low stone wall, which appeared to her to be a bundle of clothes. But as she came nearer she saw it was a man, who slowly rose and looked at her. In the dim light she caught his glance of deadly hate, and held her breath for terror. In that instant a muttered curse broke from Shere Ahmed Khan, his finger on the trigger of the pistol in his hand.

“A woman ! A dog ! It is nought. Let her go.”

As she trotted on, she discerned a horseman coming towards her, and, to her relief, she recognized her lover, who in a moment was at her side.

“How good of you to go to see me, darling ; but how very rash of you. It was a mad thing to do. Yes, I have had a bad bout of fever,” he said, in reply to her enquiry why she had not heard from him. “It was a near squeak for twenty-four hours, but I am getting on all right now.”

“You look so ill, Hugh, I am sure you ought not to have ridden so far to-day. You must get sick leave and come into cantonments and let me look after you. Do dear ; I know all about fever, and am a first-rate hand at invalid cooking.”

“I will see if it can be done. But don’t worry about me, I shall be quite well soon. And now, my dearest girl, I must go. I wish I could go with you, but I must get back to-night. It was so unlucky to have missed you, and I am so sorry

you had that long ride all alone dear."

"Good-bye. It is so dark and so late, Hugh; it makes me feel a little anxious about you. Send me a wire to say you have got there safely."

And so they parted. A second later a sentry challenged her.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

She called out loudly, "Friend!" and at that moment a sharp report rang out behind her, and, rising in her stirrup, she looked back. She saw her lover, who had crossed the bridge which she had passed a few moments before, swaying in his saddle, as his horse started wildly forward—then he fell headlong to the ground. Turning, she galloped over the few yards to where he lay, and slipping off her pony, she knelt down beside him, endeavouring with her handkerchief to staunch the blood which was flowing from a wound in his side. Immediately afterwards, the guard from the barracks had come up to them.

"Follow him!" she said. "I saw the man who did it. He went that way over the bridge. You will catch him if you go after him at once."

"Ah, the murtherin' villian, the ruffian's done for him, I fear. I'll have the d——d skunk, or me name's not Pathrick, that I swear. And you, me bhoys, one of ye stay with the leddie, and t'others run off to hospital, and bring along a stretcher as fast as ye can."

And having issued these directions as rapidly as possible, Patrick O'Shaughnessy started off in pursuit of the "black divil," as he called him,

and in a very short time he caught sight of a flying figure off the road in front of him, which, with a rifle-shot through the ankle-bone, he brought down ; but he discreetly waited for reinforcements to come up before attempting to take his prisoner.

Hugh Harlake was carried to the hospital, where after a consultation the doctors agreed that, though dangerously wounded, his case was not absolutely hopeless. For some weeks his life hung in the balance, but eventually he pulled through, and Avice's careful nursing did the rest.

Shere Ahmed Khan was sentenced to be hanged. When asked if he had anything to say he replied, " Nothing. I am sorry I did not shoot the woman, too," and went to his death stoically.

Not long afterwards the expected disturbances in Chitral broke out, and Hugh Harlake's regiment was ordered to the front. Avice passed through a time of cruel anxiety and suspense ; then came the glad news that the affair was over, and that Hugh Harlake's name had been honourably mentioned in the home dispatches for conspicuous bravery and distinguished services, which was followed by unusually rapid promotion, and leave for him to proceed to England. At the same time came a letter from his father, proud of his son's achievements, promising to pay his debts, and offering a cordial welcome to his fiancée. " Make haste and get married, my dear, and bring Hugh back to us," the old Squire said.

And Avice was not adverse to granting his request.

THE WOMAN AND THE CHILD

A TRAIN from Bombay had just drawn up at a station on the railway to Mussoorie, and from it descended a motley crowd of natives and Europeans, one and all glad to escape for a few minutes from the hot and stuffy carriages, the English passengers pressing towards the refreshment-room, hoping to find something they could eat. Amongst those who loitered near the tables—where knives, forks, and plates clattered, and voices laughing and talking caused an incessant hum and buzz, over which the chatter and shouts of excited natives outside could be heard, adding their noise to the general confusion—stood a tall and pretty woman, and beside her a fair-haired boy of three or four. The little fellow had been ill with fever, and much against her will she had left her husband in Bombay to take the child away to the Hills, hoping the cooler atmosphere would bring some colour to his cheeks.

“Come, Lorrie, you must be quick, the bell will ring directly, and we shall be left behind if we don’t begin to look for our carriage.”

As she spoke, a good-looking young officer passed her, saying :—

“Plenty of time, Mrs. Levett. They won’t start yet awhile. Going to hook on a Rajah and his Ranee, and I don’t know how many ladies of

the harem besides. That's what all this row is about, they're shunting the carriages now."

"A Ranee! How interesting. I should so like to see her. Come along, Lorrie, we'll go and have a look at her; I've never seen a real live Ranee," and picking up the child she went out on to the platform, when she saw that several fresh carriages had been added to their train, and had pulled up almost opposite to where she stood. With the temerity of her nationality she went forward, and stood on the step of one of them trying to peep in, and as a pair of black eyes met hers through the chinks of the Venetian blinds, she said in Hindustani:—

"May I come in and see the Ranee? Is she in here?"

The door was opened by a youthful damsel who greeted her with a profound salaam, as she pointed to a veiled figure seated on the floor of the compartment, in the customary attitude of her race, who put back her veil as Mrs. Levett advanced towards her, saying with a smile:—

"Surely you may enter. I am the Ranee. The English lady does me too much honour. Come here by me, and we will talk."

She was very lovely; her skin, of course, was brown, but her eyes were large and soft, with a peculiarly sweet and wistful look in them; her other features were straight and small, of quite a classic type, and the shape of her face was oval. The veil she had cast aside was of green gauze embroidered in gold thread, and her dress was rich

and besprinkled with precious stones, while on her bosom hung a jewel composed of emeralds and brilliants, which sparkled and shone even in the semi-darkness of the Venetian windows of the railway carriage.

“I am Mrs. Levett,” said that lady, as the Ranee stooped down preparatory to getting herself comfortably established on the floor ; and as she did so, Lorrie tried to seize the jewel whose glittering gems attracted his attention at once.

“Oh, Lorrie, that is naughty ! You must not snatch like that !”

The Ranee unfastened the pendant from the chain which held it, and put it in the child’s hands, who immediately began to examine the plaything he had coveted.

“Do not scold him, lady, he may play with it.” Then her face saddened as she asked, “Is this your only little one ?”

“No, I have two more boys in England, but this is my youngest, and I am taking him to Mussoorie because he was ill with fever and I thought he would die.”

“Ah, what would I not give to have a boy like that ! You have a son—you are full of the riches of God. Take care of him, do not let him die.”

At that moment the bell rang, and Mrs. Levett tried hastily to rise, saying, “We must go, Lorrie, the train will start directly. Give the Ranee her jewel, and say good-bye.”

But Lorrie having got possession of a new toy was not going to relinquish it without a struggle,

and though his lip went down threatening a storm of tears, he clenched his little hands and held on to it firmly.

“Don’t go,” said the Ranee, “we can travel together to the next station, and you can stay and talk to me. We will get some sweetmeats, and the boy shall play with my necklace as long as he likes,” and turning to her women who were grouped around the compartment, silently taking a keen interest in what had passed, she bade them bring some cakes and bonbons to pacify the child.

“He is so pretty—so fair. You are happy because you have your sons. You have three, and I have none. Will you sell your boy to me, lady? The Rajah is rich, and he will give lacs of rupees for such a boy as this. Say, how much will you sell him for?” And she drew Lorrie towards her, and fondled him caressingly.

“I could not sell him to the Rajah not if he gave me lacs and lacs of rupees. It is true I have my other children, but this one is very precious to me, too.”

The Ranee gazed at her wistfully and sighed, and after a moment’s pause said, “You are going to Mussoorie? Then you get out just beyond this. I am sorry. I like to talk to you. Where will you stay to-night?”

“I must go to a dâk bungalow at Rajpore. I hear there are two or three.”

“Yes, that is so. But there is one to which you must not go, the one outside the city. There

is a dreadful story told about that place. I pray you, do not go there."

"Why? Are there thieves, or Thugs, or is it cholera?" said Mrs. Levett, thinking of the dangers of which she had most frequently heard, and which hitherto were unknown to her, as she had only a few months previously disembarked in Bombay.

"No, no, not that. They say that it is haunted. Do not take your darling there. The fright might kill him."

"How is it haunted? Do you know the story?"

"Listen. It was a woman of my tribe. She loved an Englishman, and he left her in Peshawar, and went away to his own country and married one of his own people; and, by-and-by, his regiment went to Bombay, and he came there with his wife and one baby, like your baby, but younger. And the baby was very sick, and the wife called for an ayah to go with her to the Hills and take care of it; and the woman of my tribe had come from Peshawar to look for the man she loved, and she went with the English lady as her ayah. And when they came to this bungalow the mother was very tired and she slept soundly, and in the night the woman took a big knife and cut the baby's throat from ear to ear, and carried the body away and threw it into the jungle and fled. And when the mother awoke, her child was gone, and she called out and cried for someone to come and help her. And the coolies came and searched about, and found the dead baby. And the mother went

back to the Englishman and showed the body, but he said never a word, only he knew the woman had done it. And so he sent and caught her, and she was tried for murder and was hanged. And now, when any white child is in that bungalow, the woman comes, and walks all through it carrying the baby in her arms, and its head falls back and shows its little throat with the great wound in it."

"What a ghastly story! I wish you had not told me, for if I have to go there I shall feel so frightened now."

"Do not go there, I entreat you, dear lady. Do not go to that dreadful place."

Presently they reached the station where they must leave the train, as the rest of the journey would have to be made in a hired tonga. So, reluctantly, Mrs. Levett rose to go, and the Ranee embraced the child warmly, holding him close to her many times as though she could not bear to part with him; then bade farewell, but not before she had tied the jewel round Lorrie's neck with her own hands, saying, "He must keep it in remembrance of Guzra Bai."

It was late and getting dark when a tonga drew up at the dâk bungalow outside the town and Mrs. Levett got down from it, and lifting out Lorrie, stood for some moments regarding the surroundings with uncertainty and some dread. Somewhat daunted by the Ranee's narrative, she had been to all the other rest-houses in the place, hoping in vain to get an entrance, but they were all

already occupied, and now she must perforce take refuge in this one, or sleep in the tonga ; for Lorrie was tired and hungry, and it was time he was in bed.

The appearance of the place was not encouraging. The bungalow was sadly out of repair, and presented a forlorn and broken-down exterior ; the *chicks* hung in tatters and rattled against the posts, and the furniture generally had a worn and faded appearance. The reputation of the place was well known, and the Indian natives are very superstitious, so that it was difficult to persuade anyone to live there, except one aged convict, who was busy unfastening the doors and making pretence to do what he could to receive her.

The country looked wild and desolate. No friendly lights glimmered from neighbouring homes, as there were none nearer than Rajpore, and the lights of the town seemed very far away. Close behind the bungalow, and divided from it only by the dry bed of a river, rose the mountains she was to ascend on the morrow, towering far above her and lost in dim space, while they threw a grim black shadow all around. She gave a shudder, and then a sigh. There was no help for it ; she must go in and make the best of it. It was foolish to have listened to the silly tale, and she must summon all her courage to face the coming hours of darkness all alone. Yet not alone ; she had Lorrie, and he would keep her company, and banish unquiet thoughts.

She called her “bearer,” and had her things

bestowed in the most presentable room, and by the time the lamps were lit the bungalow looked brighter and things began to seem less dismal. Afterwards she undressed the child and gave him to the "bearer," who walked about with him till he was fast asleep ; the man then, finding his mistress wanted nothing more, went to his own quarters, and she prepared to go to rest. Not without misgivings did she lay her head upon the pillow, one arm flung over Lorrie to keep him near her, though for some while her nerves were too unstrung to let her sleep. But the day's fatigues had wearied her, and at last, almost without knowing it, thought vanished and she slept.

The night was wearing towards daybreak when she awoke with a great start. An oil wick which she had left burning on the dressing-table had suddenly gone out and left the room in darkness, save for one solitary gleam of moonlight which struck across the doorway of the room, and as her eyes opened slowly, her vision trying to penetrate the gloom, she heard a sound which made her heart throb wildly, and then stand still with terror.

A soft "sud, sud" sounded over the floor just like the passing of bare feet across the boards. "The woman and the child," she thought. "Oh, horror!" There was a moment's silence, her quaking limbs almost betraying that she was awake, then those feet again, coming nearer and nearer and passing round the bed. For a moment, whilst hardly daring to breathe, she gazed towards the place where they had ceased, and through the

dim gleam of moonlight she perceived the outline of a hideous, distorted, undefined shape of woman-kind. The certainty that some supernatural being stood there seemed to temporarily paralyze her mind and body, and before she had time to realize its intention, two long sinewy arms were stretched across the bed towards Lorrie, in another second they had snatched up the sleeping child, and the figure vanished into the darkness.

With one wild piercing shriek she tried to rise, and fainted, while at the same instant a huge baboon, scared by the unusual sound, dropped its unconscious burden on the floor, and bounding over the verandah, disappeared into the jungle near the house. Lorrie, awakened by his rude fall, began to cry most lustily, but the "bearer," although aroused by his persistent lamentations, would not venture from his room behind the bungalow until some reassuring rays of sunshine began to penetrate through the interstices in the planks which formed the door. Lorrie welcomed his familiar presence by a temporary cessation of tears, whilst he asseverated again and again that his mamma was dead. He was reassured when, thanks to the servant's kindly ministrations, she opened her eyes once more and spoke to him. As soon as she had recovered sufficient strength, she sprang up and dressed hastily, eager to leave the hateful place.

But the shock had so upset her that, even when safely established in the bright and cheerful atmosphere of the Hills, she could not shake off the

effect of it, and eventually wrote to her husband to come and join her, which he did. She told him the story, and said that she could not rest at night, terrified that the apparition might again visit her, imagining it portended some evil to her Lorrie. But Dr. Levett laughed at her fears, and told her it was only an exaggerated case of nightmare. She, however, could not be convinced, never doubting the evidence of her senses, and ever afterwards she averred that she had seen a ghost, and is a firm believer in the supernatural.

About a year later her husband, who had come out to India originally as junior partner to a leading doctor in Bombay, received a strange and unexpected communication. It appeared to have come from a well-known Rajah in the Punjab, who informed Dr. Levett that he wrote at the request of his Ranee, to send the following message to his wife : “Guzra Bai sends greeting. I have now in my possession a jewel infinitely more precious than the one I gave your child. God has given me a son, and I am full of all riches and all honour. Dear lady, fare you well, and may your children live to bless and honour you !”

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.

THE semi-darkness of a tropical night had fallen, for in the East it never seems so densely dark as in our Western hemisphere, illuminated by a cloudless sky with masses of bright shining stars set in the clear vault of heaven ; the grounds and gardens surrounding the palace of the Rajah of Rakoun-thala were half shrouded in obscurity, the mingled scents of flowers perfume-laden hung heavily on the evening air, and the plash of many fountains sounded rhythmically, as the sprays of water rose and fell at different points, refreshing the heated atmosphere with cooling drops of moisture. Occasionally, the sound of voices penetrated within the enclosing walls, or the rumble of cart-wheels echoed along the road outside, as some wayfarers hurried past towards the city.

A winding path wandered through a grove of orange trees, the scented blossoms falling continuously, spreading an odorous carpet underneath ; and along it the figures of two women were stealing cautiously, one behind the other, towards where a small gate was visible in the garden wall. The first was thickly veiled, and as she advanced with noiseless footsteps, she looked neither to the right nor to the left of her, as though absorbed by the object that she sought ; the other, who followed her closely, lifted her veil with one hand, in order that, as she pressed forward, she could frequently .

glance over her shoulder to make sure that they were not watched.

When they reached the gate they stopped, both silently listening to catch the slightest sound, the woman who had first arrived there regarding her companion steadfastly through the white draperies which enveloped her from head to foot. Suddenly she whispered "Quick, Nareina, open the door."

With trembling fingers the girl produced a key, and with a muttered prayer to Allah for protection and safety, she placed it in the lock and turned it; slowly the door was pushed back, and a man stepped into the garden, closing it after him.

"Go, child," the veiled woman said, "remain over there at the corner, and come to me at once if any one appears in sight," and, with a deep salaam, the attendant left her.

The man who had entered was tall and powerful-looking; his legs were bare, his feet shod with sandals, and a long coat of some thin material fell from his shoulders to below his knees, and was fastened round his waist by a broad belt, through which were stuck a sheathed dagger and a somewhat cumbrous pistol of a peculiar make, the latter ornamented in quaint oriental fashion, and the handle of the dagger was studded with precious stones roughly set in the hilt of it. A coloured turban was wrapt round his head, and under it was a singularly handsome countenance. Straight features, the nose and chin delicately chiselled; an olive skin so lightly tinted as to be almost European but for a pair of black eyes, whose fierce expres-

sion bespoke the untamed spirit within, and the fire in the man's soul.

The woman spoke first. She had a sweet, soft voice, which rippled out seductively the accents of her native tongue.

“Speak, Mahmad, and briefly, for I shall be missed if I stay long here. What brings you? What do you want with me !”

“You had my letter, and you know why I have come. The money—have you got it for me?”

“Alas, I cannot, I have tried by persuasion, by coquetry, by a thousand cajoleries, all in vain. Maharajah is immoveable. He will know the reason why I need so large a sum, or he will give nothing.”

“Bah ! there are more ways than one to an end if the heart is really in it. I tell you I must have the money. The rifles are there, ready to be delivered, but the agent will give no delivery until the amount is paid. Meanwhile, time passes ; all other tribes are ready, they await only the Mullah's signal to begin. Shall our people stand back, when the rest go forward ? Shall we be laggards, while others fight for freedom and their country ? And you—you live here in state and luxury—you are the king's favourite—when your people cry for help, you hear them not, you shut your ears and close your eyes, and fold your hands to lie down to sleep in peace and plenty, and you say : ‘ I cannot,’ but I say, *you must*. If he will not give it to you, then you shall steal it. Do something, anything, but get the money. Do you hear, girl ?” he said,

as he grasped her arm, and shook it impatiently.

“Hush, hush, don’t speak so loud. Some one will hear us, and then all will be lost. Let go my arm ; don’t be angry, you frighten me, Mahmad. See, I will do this for you, but you must give me another day. I will get the money somehow—I will think of a plan. Come here to-morrow night at the same hour, and Nareina shall bring it to you. I could not come myself, perhaps, but I will send a message, so be ready. Now I must go. Remember, to-morrow,” and she beckoned to Nareina to unfasten the gate as she hurried away, retracing her steps towards the palace, whence came sounds of merriment and light laughter ; her women disporting themselves with various amusements before retiring for the night.

The man had spoken the truth. Kasardar was the king’s favourite, she could do almost anything with him that she pleased, but one thing she had not yet succeeded in doing. The Maharajah owed allegiance of the British Government, and was a loyal subject of the Empress Queen.

The Ranee, Kasardah, was a native of one of the wild tribes on the frontier ; she was beautiful, and her parents were poor, so they offered her to the Rajah’s harem when she was but a child. The Maharajah was years older than the lovely creature of twelve years of age, who entered the lists against so many rivals in his household ; he was stout and elderly, and could hardly be attractive to a young girl. But Kasardah soon discovered that he loved her, and before long she learnt to use her power

or her own interests. She was gradually promoted to further favour in her master's eyes, until the fortunate hour when she presented her infatuated husband with a sturdy son, and found herself promoted to the position of first wife, all the others being made subservient to her.

But although showering benefits on her, the Maharajah warned her that with intrigue of any sort she had better have nothing to do. He knew full well there was probability of growing disturbances on the frontier, and suspected that her people might endeavour to make a tool of her, to obtain their ends. She had hinted at a request for the gift of a considerable sum of money, but had been met by a qualified consent. Her husband must know for what purpose the money would be used. This Kasardah dared not tell him, and she feared that any attempt at prevarication might compromise her, and bring about the discovery of what she was unwillingly plotting, and that she knew would be followed by disgrace, possibly by the forfeit of her life.

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The principal thoroughfare of the city was thronged with passengers ; it was the hour before sundown, the busiest time in the day, when the heat and the glare were over, and the natives crowded from their homes in the narrow, evil-smelling back streets, into their common meeting-place, the square in the centre of the town ; where, in gossip or shopping, they could pass their leisure before returning to their respective domiciles for

the night. Some men stood in an open spot throwing handfuls of grain to the sacred pigeons, which flocked from various nooks above, swooping down into the roadway below to pick up their evening meal. To the left of the square was a long low building enclosed in a stone wall ; this was the Maharajah's stables, in which were stalled some three hundred of the finest animals that the horse markets of Bombay or Calcutta could produce.

A carriage much gilded, and with horses grandly caparisoned, was advancing slowly up the street : it was set apart for the use of the Ranee, and was returning to the stable, having taken that lady for an airing that afternoon.

The syce pulled up to answer an interrogation made to him by a friend.

“ An easy job to-day ! Been cooling our heels outside the house of the Dowager Ranee for two full hours. Chatter ! Chatter ! how these women talk, to be sure,” said the coachman as he lazily flicked away the flies which were teasing his horses, making them restive and troublesome about standing so near their home.

“ A visit to the Queen-Mother, do you say ? That's a rare event surely ? I thought there was no love lost between Ranee Kasardah and the old lady, eh ? ”

“ True, Musuppah ; but sometimes there is diversion in seeing those one does not love too much. Certainly the Ranee is not over free with her favours ; for it's a year, quite, since last we

went that way. But it's late, and I am hungry, so good-night," and he touched up the horses with his whip as he drove off towards the stable-yard.

At the same moment Kasardah, fatigued with her drive and the conference with her mother-in-law, was lying resting in the privacy of her own chamber. The walls were of white marble ; lattice work, so finely carved as to appear like filmy lace, formed the windows, which looked out into the flower garden, redolent of roses blooming in profusion, close by ; the floor was covered with mats of exquisite workmanship, brought from the looms of Umritza or embroidered orientally by hand ; and the divan on which the Ranee lay was covered with many-coloured cushions of the richest and loveliest silks. Kasardah made a pretty picture reclining there ; her smooth round neck uncovered, a drapery of blue and silver swathed her limbs, a tinge of vivid red brightened her creamy skin, and her soft brown eyes, with darker lashes covering them, languidly surveyed the room, about which one or two of her women were moving.

Suddenly Nareina appeared, carrying towards her mistress a tray with sweetmeats, sherbert and other refreshments.

"Put it down," said Kasardah, "and tell them all to go ; I am tired, I wish to be alone."

With a signal to the women, Nareina cleared the apartment ; then telling Kasardah she would be at hand if called for, she also disappeared, drawing the curtains behind her. For a moment

Kasardah lay still ; then, raising herself on her elbow, she listened intently to hear whether Nareina had retreated along the passage. Her bare feet on the soft carpets made it difficult to hear, but the bangles round her ankles clinked together as she moved away a few yards, and seated herself in the cross-legged attitude of her race to await the summons of her mistress.

With eyes still fixed upon the curtains, Kasardah snatched up one of the smaller cushions beneath her head ; then, with the blade of a little pen-knife which lay amongst other knick-knacks near her, she severed the stitches which fastened one of the seams. A movement in the passage at that moment made her fling the cushion behind her, and with her head upon it and her eyes closed, she waited, wondering whether anyone would enter ; but after a pause without further interruption from outside, she raised herself once more, and, opening a jewelled clasp at her waist, she drew from the folds of her robe a necklace of emeralds, the size and colouring of which were of dazzling brilliancy. This she dropped into the interior of the cushion cover, while at the same moment, with her other hand, she produced from the same hiding-place a glorious cascade of diamonds, which shone and sparkled in the light for the few seconds before they, too, disappeared inside the silken wrapper of the cushion.

Taking a needleful of filoselle from some fancy-work beside her, with quickly moving fingers she fastened together the seam she had opened ; this

done, once more her head rested quietly on the cushion as though she slept.

An hour later Nareina entered to inquire whether the Ranee had eaten and was rested, and whether she had any further commands.

“Come here, child, and look at me. I can trust you?” she asked, gazing anxiously in her waiting-maid’s face.

“Surely you can trust me, is not Nareina your slave? Am I not of your own people, and do I not love you as no other can?” and she knelt before her mistress, taking the Ranee’s hand, and pressing it to her forehead, while she made a low obeisance, almost touching the floor.

“Maharajah comes to me shortly, and I may not leave my room and stroll in the garden as I did last night. Will Nareina be my messenger? ’Tis for the last time.”

The girl knew instinctively that a service of danger was required of her, but she did not flinch.

“Beloved lady, Nareina would die to serve you. Give me your message.”

“Go to the little gate—you have the key. Admit the friend who came last night. He has a long journey to take to-morrow, and will require some sleep in travelling,” then taking the cushion from under her head, she placed it in the girl’s hands, saying, “Give him this. Say, ‘Kasardah sends herewith a token of sweet rest ; farewell.’”

Nareina took the thing, expressing no surprise, even though she felt under her fingers the outline of the jewels whose sparkle she could not see. She

raised the token to her forehead as she made her deep salaam, and with noiseless footfall vanished through the curtain as the Maharajah by another doorway entered the room.

And outside, leaning against the Palace wall, an emissary from the Dowager Ranee watched the little gate, and saw Mahmad step through it and disappear into the darkness, carrying beneath his coat the jewels stolen that day by Kasardah, the price of a thousand rifles, the cost of many a brave Englishman's life.

At noon next day the Palace of the Ranee was in a turmoil. Frightened women stood in groups along the corridors whispering together in undertones, glancing with apprehension towards the door of entrance to the Maharajah's Council Chamber whither Kasardah had been summoned, at short notice, to attend ; a most unusual proceeding, and consequently food for anxious questioning on the part of those of her personal attendants, who were interested in her keeping her place as first favourite with the King.

Kasardah had good reason to guess why she was called before her lord, and, knowing full well what accusation she would have to meet, her spirit might have quailed at the recollection of her guilt. But, to her, the matter seemed no sin. She argued to herself that she was bound to help her people, and to obey the behest of the man who was her sole relative, the brother who had taken upon himself to be the leader of his tribe, and who trusted to her riches and her loyalty, to

provide the means wherewith he could purchase arms for the *jehad* (religious war) he was going to undertake.

So, obeying the Rajah's summons with all speed, she arrayed herself in her most regal garments, and entered the Council Chamber with a haughty air and a proud look. The Rajah's mother stood by his side, and near him some of his most trusted advisers, and a few dignitaries of his court.

He beckoned to his wife to approach, and in a few words, spoken with unusual sternness of voice and manner, he told her of what she was accused.

His mother had been pleased and flattered by her impromptu visit on the previous day, little imagining when Kasardah asked permission to inspect her jewels, that treachery was concealed in her heart. She had been permitted to view the jewels without restraint, and it was not till an hour after she had departed, that the Queen-Mother discovered that valuables worth more than a lac of rupees had disappeared. She unhesitatingly accused Kasardah of the theft, for no one had entered the inner chamber where the jewels were kept after Kasardah left, until the Queen-Mother herself went to put them away.

“Kasardah, what have you to say?”

“Most High and Exalted, it seems to me strangely unaccountable that you can deign to listen to so wicked an accusation, so vile an invention as this that the Queen-Mother has come hither to prefer against me, hoping to strike me to the ground. Yes, she is your mother; and

hitherto I have honoured her as such, knowing well her evil thoughts towards me, her desire to do me harm. She hates me, because she looks on me as one, not of her own caste or country, but of an alien race. I am not ashamed of my country nor of my people, so that I have found favour in the eyes of my Master and my Lord ; and I say that this thing is a lie, for have I not jewels of my own, given me by my Rajah, most Excellent and Mighty, jewels more precious and valuable than those she tells you I have stolen from her, infinitely more precious to me, as the giver of them was the father of my child."

The mention of her son was a diplomatic touch, the effect of which was not lost upon the Rajah, who turned enquiringly towards the Royal dame standing by him. She was casting on her daughter-in-law malevolent glances of distrust and hate, and now turned with a scornful gesture towards her son. A torrent of vituperation had been ready to flow from her lips at every pause in Kasardah's speech, which had only been kept in check by signs for silence made at intervals by the King. Now she broke forth.

" You are a fool, my son. This woman laughs at you. Ask her who is the man who has twice entered her garden by night, when she supposed no one was watching her. Let her deny it, if she will, there are witnesses to prove it. No doubt she stole the jewels for her lover. Ask her ! Let her speak ! "

There was a stir throughout the audience at this

last accusation, and during the pause that followed it, the cheeks of Kasardah paled beneath the veil that covered her, whilst her lips trembled, a token that for a moment her courage had failed her. Only for a moment, though ; then she answered, coming close to the Rajah and throwing herself at his feet :

“ Great, and Most Honoured, listen to me. I came to you straight from my mother’s keeping, I was but a little child, I had been nowhere, I had seen no one, I knew no one. Since then never have I left you, I am always your faithful and devoted wife. No man could be my lover, for I love you, my husband, and you only. This is my answer,” and she bowed her head to the ground before him.

The Rajah was touched ; but his mother was determined not to allow Kasardah so easy a victory. She cried out in shrill tones that the evidence of her secretary Hassan Ali, might be taken, for he had seen a stranger leave the Palace Gardens by the little gate, the previous night. The man was called and came forward, briefly stating what he had seen, which was not sufficient alone to incriminate the Ranee, had it not been for the coincidence of the theft of the jewels on the same day. All the while Kasardah knelt motionless in front of the Rajah, waiting for his orders to rise. The witness was told to retire, and twice the Dowager essayed to speak, but was ordered to be silent, whilst the Rajah pondered over the matter with a heavy heart, his hand covering his eyes.

At last he spoke, addressing the prostrate figure of his wife.

“Kasardah, you have heard this man’s evidence. What have you to say?”

Kneeling before him, she slightly raised her veil, and gazed at him with tear-filled eyes. For the first time since he had made her his wife he saw her beautiful face clouded with trouble, and he faltered in his determination to be severe. There was a pause, while he waited for her to speak; then, in a low voice, she simply murmured:

“I have said.”

“That is not enough. Do you know who was the man who left your garden in the darkness last night?”

She sprang to her feet, and with folded arms and head held high, she spoke loudly, defiance in her tone.

“I tell you, I have said.”

A look of angry displeasure crossed the Rajah’s face as he bade her withdraw, and commanded that she should be *purdah* until released by his consent. It was a sentence of dismissal, and she left the audience chamber to find herself a prisoner in her own apartments, with the bitterness of disappointment heavy on her, mingled with the fear of more troubles to come. Her personal attendants were removed from her, and strangers were introduced in their place; and she had a vague apprehension that she was surrounded by enemies, the creatures of the mother of the king.

Two days passed by, and gradually the inquisi-

tiveness of the numerous occupants of the harem succeeded in eliciting the story of the stolen jewels, and the cause of Ranee Kasardah's disgrace leaked out; eventually it reached the ears of Nareina, who had been consumed with grief at the downfall of her mistress, while she entreated those in authority to permit her to attend on her imprisoned lady, and to be allowed to minister to her wants. When at length she heard about the lost jewelry, she went boldly and demanded audience of the Rajah, sending in a message that she brought an important explanation respecting the matter of the theft, and could elucidate the mystery. She was admitted, and was granted permission to speak. She then declared that she herself had been the perpetrator of the crime of which her mistress was accused.

“I went with the Ranee to visit her mother-in-law, and was allowed to enter the inner chamber where the jewels were kept. I slipped the necklaces inside my vesture, while the Ranee talked in the room outside.”

“For what purpose did you steal these things? You—who are a mere servant in the household of the Ranee—you, who are not fit to lie at her feet?”

“It is true, I am not fit to stand before the purest and most noble; I took the jewels to give to my brother, who owed a debt that he must pay.”

“Your brother! This, then, is the man who left the garden of the palace by the little gate the night the precious gems were stolen?”

“Even so; this was indeed the man. He is

freed now from debt, and is far away from here by this time. Nareina will be happy so that her mistress may also be free."

"Take her away," the Rajah exclaimed furiously, as he signed the warrant for her execution, and immediately afterwards wrote the order for the release of Kasardah, which he joyfully despatched, commanding her to be in readiness to receive him.

Poor Nareina! dragged away to her unmerited doom, she murmured: "To save you, Light of my Soul," raising her eyes towards the latticed window from which Kasardah gazed forth listlessly, wondering whether she would ever regain her lost position, and be restored to favour with the King.

When Kasardah heard how the Rajah had been convinced of her innocence, Nareina had been dead some hours, and the thought of her handmaiden's sacrifice, clouded the brightness of the Ranee's hour of triumph, and overshadowed the sunshine of her joy. For Kasardah knew that the devotion of a faithful follower is far more precious than jewels of great price; and that nothing, not even the wealth of the Indies, can be compensation for the loss of a trustworthy and loyal friend.

A CLOSED ACCOUNT

THE Yacht Club in Bombay was giving one of its successful entertainments ; the *élite* of all circles civil and military had been bidden to a ball, which was in full swing, couples were revolving on the polished floor to the strains of a first-rate band, whilst others, too lazy to dance, were dispersed about the various reception-rooms, chatting, card-playing, etc., as their fancy prompted them. Outside, the light from the open doorways streamed across the garden, which was further illuminated by pretty many-coloured lamps, and showed some groups of other guests strolling up and down talking in low tones, or sitting in cosy corners conversing *tête-à-tête*.

Among these, seated somewhat apart from the rest, were a good-looking, dark-moustached man of about eight-and-twenty years of age, and a handsome, well-dressed woman. Their chairs were placed close to the low stone wall, beyond which the sea lapped gently as the ripples struck the shore, and a bright moon shone overhead.

“Do you know, Captain Woodward, I begin to think you are a very conceited as well as a very heartless man. Do you mean to tell me that it is really your proud boast that you have already wrecked the happiness of two unsuspecting persons, and that it is your intention to repeat this

reprehensible conduct whenever the opportunity comes in your way ? ”

“ Pardon me, I did not wreck their happiness ; I merely tested the sincerity of the love which they were sufficiently deluded to imagine they felt for one another. My theory is that half the girls who get engaged do so because they are persuaded to it by their match-making mammas ; possibly the desire to appear of special consequence in the estimation of less fortunate spinsterhood has something to do with it, and doubtless there are other equally absurd reasons known only to the vagaries of the feminine mind.

“ In my opinion they are very seldom influenced by the all-important consideration that they should be absolutely and absorbingly devoted to the man they intend to wed, which is the one and only true essential, you will agree with me, if they hope to be happy, after the first excitement and novelty of married life is past. So I have bound myself by a mental vow to undertake a crusade against inexpedient marriages, and do all that I can to mar instead of make them, and it seems to me there is but one way to achieve this result.”

“ And that is ? ”

“ To make love to the innocent and deluded victims myself.”

“ Upon my word ! And you dare to assert that you consider yourself so irresistible that you have only to come and be seen, to conquer. You may justify such a course to yourself, and say you are acting kindly and worthily in endeavouring to

rescue these poor girls from the fate towards which they are ignorantly tending ; but let me tell you that, as you can't explain your theory to the general public as you have to me, there are some people who will give you credit for a very different motive, and you will get called hard names before your well-meant efforts have attained their desired end. If you will forgive me for speaking plainly, let me advise you to mind your own business, and leave the engaged couples alone, or you will get yourself into a mess that you won't find easy to get out of."

"That's just what I am doing—minding my own business. I make it my business, and find it extremely interesting and amusing. Now, for example, take Miss Aynsley, who is just engaged to young Delacroix in her father's regiment. She is a pretty girl, clever and refined, full of health and spirits, ready to enjoy life and make it worth the living, but not a bit the wife for Delacroix, who is a weak sort of creature, amiable, well meaning, but unmistakably an ass. But his father's rich, and by-and-by he'll get the dibs, and know how to spend them too.

"That fellow has no more notion of the value of money than a baby. He's been accustomed all his life to have what he wanted for the asking, and thinks it fine to chuck away money right and left—racing, gambling, and playing the fool generally all round. But Mrs. Aynsley knows he has good prospects, and so she's determined her daughter shall marry this boy, and the boy is attracted by

continual flattery and by the freshness and prettiness of the young lady, and is easily persuaded to propose. He's in earnest—very much so, too ; but Gertrude Aynsley isn't, and if they marry she'll find out, as so many others do, that she has made a mistake. But I don't mean to let the marriage take place if I can help it. What do you bet it isn't broken off within the next three months, Mrs. Crothers?"

" I won't take such a bet ; I think these things are too serious to jest about."

" I'm not jesting, I mean every word I say."

" Then take care, or some day if you are so meddlesome you will burn your fingers. Far better leave people to manage their own affairs ; it's dangerous to try experiments with fate. But there is Colonel Aynsley looking for me. I was engaged for this square with him, and I am afraid I've missed it. Take me to him and I'll do him a good turn to make amends for cutting his dance. I shall warn him that he has an enemy in the camp, one who has sworn to bring disappointment and destruction on the happy anticipations of his wife and child."

" Ah, come now, you won't betray me I'm sure. It was all in strictest confidence, you know," and rising they strolled across the lawn to meet the Colonel, who had just discovered his errant partner coming towards him.

Mrs. Crothers was one of the most popular women in Bombay. She held a high position there as the wife of a senior civilian, and was

therefore one of the leaders of society, where she was deservedly appreciated by all and sundry, for her charming and agreeable manners, and the *savoir faire* with which she fascinated her own sex, as well as the other which is less difficult to please. Of the latter she had her own small number of admirers, a certain few who were always in attendance, but of whom she was careful not to favour one above another. And in this she showed her wisdom, for the tongue of scandal is ever ready in these colonial cities to attack the reputation of any woman who is fair to see, and takes a prominent place in the circle in which she moves. And it requires some diplomacy for a *belle dame* to so rule the devotion of her squires as to escape a breath of calumny. Among these privileged few Captain Woodward believed himself to have been admitted, but he had not been long in Bombay, and still felt that he was only on approval with the lady, and must step warily if he wished to continue on the same terms. What he had said about Gertrude Aynsley's engagement to young Delacroix dwelt in her mind, and, on the strength of it, she thought she would try to find out whether he had judged the situation aright.

So about a fortnight after the conversation recorded above, a three-cornered missive was dispatched to Colaba, inviting her friend to a chat and tiffin on the following day.

The tiffin was duly discussed, and the ladies, having enveloped themselves in loose wrappers, were ensconced in bamboo chairs in the shady

verandah, prepared for their afternoon rest. They were a marked contrast in appearance. Mrs. Crothers was tall and fair, a beauty of the thorough English type ; Gertrude was of medium height, but very slender, with dark brown hair waving low on her forehead, and soft brown eyes, a naturally warm complexion which was already fading somewhat from the heat of India, leaving her a little too pale, but without the sallowness which so often depreciates the attractiveness of brunettes. As she lay back she looked pensively before her for several minutes, entirely forgetful of the presence of her friend.

“ A penny for your thoughts ! About Charlie Delacroix, of course ; that goes without saying.”

“ No, Blanche ; I wasn't thinking of him exactly just then. I was remembering something Captain Woodward said to me the other day on the Bund.”

“ Captain Woodward ! Beware of him, he is a born cynic and a dangerous man. What did he say dear ? ”

“ Well, he said no woman ought to marry till she's five-and-twenty ; that they don't know their own minds before then. He said he was sorry to hear of my engagement. He is the only man who has not congratulated me. What does he mean ? ”

“ Well, you know, Gertie, you are rather young, but, on the other hand, you are wise for your age, and even at nineteen I give you credit for knowing your own mind better than most women of five-and-twenty.”

“That’s just it ; I’m afraid I do. I wish—don’t think it strange if I say something to you ; you know all about it, and I’m sure you’d give me good advice. I can’t ask mother ; somehow, I never feel as if I could confide in her. She’s not that sort.”

“Ask me what you like ; your confidence is safe with me. And you may be sure I’ll help you if I can.”

“You see—Charlie, he’s awfully in love with me, and I like him ; I really do like him very much ; he so good-natured and so devoted, and so nice in every way. But he’s not clever, and he seems so young, and I am afraid—oh, I’m dreadfully afraid—I’m not in love with him. I thought I was until lately—till I was engaged to him—but now I’m sure I’m not. And I can’t tell him ; it would be no use if I did, for mother would never let me break it off. What shall I do ? They would call me a flirt and coquette, and all sorts of horrid names, if I throw him over for no reason, and I should be in such disgrace at home ; I could not bear it, I know. But what Captain Woodward said suddenly startled me into thinking that perhaps he is right, and that I gave consent too hastily.” The tears had risen to her eyes towards the end of her confession, and she hesitated, her lips trembling as she tried to speak.

Mrs. Crothers was silent for a few moments, considering what she should say. It occurred to her that during the past week or two she had seen

less than usual of Captain Woodward at the various places where they had been accustomed to meet, and she had noticed on several occasions that he had been sitting or riding with Gertrude Aynsley whenever her lover was absent from her side. It was evident he meant to carry out his intention of preventing the marriage if he could. Now, she questioned, was his motive as purely impersonal as he had pretended to her in their talk together that night?

“Will you forgive me if, before I venture to advise you, I ask you this? Do you care for anyone else?”

“Anyone else? How could I? Oh, no,” but as she said it her eyes dropped before her friend’s straight glance, and a faint blush stole to her cheeks for a few seconds.

“If there is no one else, I say don’t be in a hurry. Wait a little, perhaps you’ll get to care more for him, or if you don’t, something may happen to give you a *raison d’etre* for breaking it off.”

“But mother is so impatient to have it all over. She is already imploring me daily to fix the wedding-day, and worries me to set about orders for my trousseau, *now* at once. I have tried to put it off, but she gets angry, and once everything is arranged and bought, I feel as if I can’t escape. What can I do? Do help me, dear,” and, getting up, she went to Mrs. Crothers, and knelt beside her chair as though intreating for her aid.

“I know what we’ll do I have felt tired lately,

and I want a change. You look pale, my dear, and I shall tell your mother all this fuss has been too much for you, and you must have a rest. You must come with me to the Hills ; we'll go away for a month or so, and enjoy ourselves in our own way. Then you can think it over, and if necessary, why, I'll talk to your mother and tell her it can't be done. But by that time you may find that 'absence makes the heart grow fonder,' and Charlie Delacroix may get you after all."

"How good of you ! I should so like to go, do you really think that we can manage it? Suppose that mother should say no?"

"Oh, she won't say no, to *me*. No one ever does. Now, cheer up, that's settled. We'll have tea and go out for a long drive, and forget about love and its bothers for the present."

And Mrs. Aynsley did not say no, though she would have liked to have done so, if it had been possible without the risk of offending Mrs. Crothers, who carried off Gertrude triumphantly to enjoy a few weeks' respite from the unwelcome attentions of her lover and restore the roses to her pale cheeks with rest and fresh air.

A small gathering of mutual acquaintances came to the railway station to see them off, and as they stood on the platform saying good-bye, Captain Woodward found himself for one moment beside Mrs. Crothers.

"So I was right, she can't face it after all. But I hardly expected to find you converted to my way of thinking so soon !"

“Don’t count your chickens. You have not won yet, you know.”

“Ah, but I mean to,” and two minutes afterwards the train was gone.

* * * * *

The sun was just sinking down below the summit of the highest ridge of hills, tingeing the surrounding country with a golden glory, and throwing a broad shadow on the roads and trees, whose over-spreading branches moved gently in the evening breeze. On one of these many narrow pathways along the edge of the Khud stood two figures, leaning against the railing and watching the narrow rim of roseate sun which was just about to disappear and leave the semi-darkness of a tropical night. Gertrude Aynsley had spent four happy weeks of freedom with her friend, and on the morrow they were to descend to heat and glare, gaiety and rush, and Charlie Delacroix again. Her companion was Captain Woodward, who, with Leslie Crothers, had come up a week previously to spend the last few days with them in the soft, cool atmosphere of the hills.

Mr. Crothers had with difficulty stolen a short holiday from the arduous routine of his official work below, and had invited Captain Woodward to accompany him. Mrs. Crothers was, on their arrival, somewhat surprised, and rather inclined to resent Captain Woodward’s unexpected appearance on the scene, but he had pleaded a sharp attack of fever and her husband’s pressing invitation as his excuse for what might otherwise have seemed an

intrusion on his part, so she forgave his coming, and although she mistrusted his intentions, appeared satisfied to let him do his worst, for during those few days his acquaintance with Gertrude had advanced rapidly. He was always her escort in walks and rides, and by the eve of their departure, it was evident that she had formed a favourable impression of him and they were fast becoming great friends.

And now she was standing gazing wistfully out over the country which was so soon to fade from her sight, and with it the sense of peace and restfulness that had come to her.

“Do you know that sad little story of what happened some little while ago close by this spot? It was before we came up, but everyone talks about it still. It is strange that nothing has been yet done to make this place more safe.”

Her companion shook his head without replying, and she added :

“A tiny child was watching the sunset just as you and I are watching it now, and she ran forward to catch the last glimmer of its rays as it vanished over there ; her foot slipped below the railing, and she rolled over and over down to the bottom of the Khud. Poor mite ! She was dead when they took her up ; she had seen her last sun rise and set. I almost envy her.”

A moment's pause, and then he laid his hand on hers, and, looking earnestly in her face, said :

“By that admission you have given me the right to speak, Miss Aynsley. I know what is in

your mind, and the trouble of it. You have pledged your word to marry Delacroix and you think you mean to keep it, although you know full well by this time that you do not love him. It will be a fatal error unless you have the strength of mind to withdraw at once. Don't do it, I implore you. Don't think that any good end can result from such a disastrous course. You will only make two persons unhappy instead of one."

As he spoke he had drawn closer to her, and as he stooped over her, she felt his breath upon her cheek.

"Oh, hush," she said, "don't tempt me, I could not break my word."

And she tried to move away from him. Quite suddenly he flung his arm round her, and kissed her on her lips. The blood rushed to her face, and as he let her go, she caught at the railing to steady herself, and her feet slid from under her, so that for a second she was swinging in mid-air. It was but a momentary peril, for knowing her danger, terror gave her the impulse to hold on to the railing with all her strength, and in a minute, Captain Woodward had dragged her back, and placed her safely on terra firma once again, but his face was white as he exclaimed: "Good God, how you frightened me." For a short space neither spoke, she trembling, and he too agitated to think of anything to say. Woman-like, she was the first to recover her equanimity.

"We must go back. Blanche will think we are lost, and it is getting quite dark." Then

sinking her voice somewhat she continued : “ You know you ought not to have done that. I will try to forgive you, and I will consider what you have said. But don’t repeat it, will you ? And please, when we go down after to-morrow, keep away from me. I would rather not see you for a little while, if you don’t mind.”

“ I do mind very much, but it shall be as you wish. When you want me, or if I can be of service to you in the future, let me know.”

For reply, she held out her hand, and he pressed it silently as they turned into the compound of the bungalow.

* * * * *

It had been a late night at the mess of —th Fusiliers, and the play had been unusually high. Captain Woodward had been one of the guests, and at the end of the evening had risen the winner of a considerable sum, the chief loser being Charlie Delacroix. That young gentleman had imbibed whiskies and sodas more freely than usual, and although far from being intoxicated, had been sufficiently excited to stake recklessly, so that when they rose from the table he was rather amazed to find how heavily he had lost. He produced his cheque book, and writing out a cheque for the amount he owed, he handed it to Captain Woodward, who put it in his pocket, and was about to enter the *gharry* which was waiting for him at the foot of the stairs, when young Delacroix, who had followed him down, said hurriedly, as they stood for a moment on the last step :

“ By the way, Woodward, I should be obliged if you would hold over that cheque for a week or two. I am afraid I have not enough at the bank to meet it at present, but I expect to get a remittance from home shortly, when it will be paid.”

“ All right, I’ll remember,” and he drove away.

But within three days the cheque had been presented at the bank, and had been returned to Captain Woodward with the words “ no account ” written across. He smiled as he put it in his pocket, and the next afternoon, when he started for his ride, he turned his horse towards the Aynsley’s bungalow. Some weeks had passed since they had come down from the hills together, and he had hardly seen Gertrude to speak to since. He respected her wishes, and had abstained from seeking any but a few meetings of a casual kind. Meanwhile there was no sign of her engagement being broken off, and within the last few days it had been rumoured that the wedding-day was fixed. Perhaps it was this report which had prompted him to take desperate measures to gain his end.

“ The mem sahib was out,” the butler said, “ but Miss Aynsley would see him.” He could not have wished for better luck.

As Gertrude rose and came towards him he was struck with the alteration in her looks. She was much thinner and had dark rings under her eyes, and when the blush faded, which had risen to her face as he entered, she was very pale indeed.

“Mother is out. Shall I do instead?” she asked with a smile.

“You will do better. I came to see you to ask you if it is true that your marriage is fixed for next month?”

“It is true,” she answered, seating herself at a little distance from him. He walked towards an open window and stood for a moment looking out of it, then turned abruptly, and his words came rapidly from his mouth.

“You can’t do it. I won’t let you do it. See here, the man’s a weak-minded idiot. I’m not sure he’s not worse. He isn’t fit to tie your shoe-string. Even though it’s definitely settled, give it up. I intreat you to give it up.”

She clasped her hands as if to hide that they were shaking, thus betraying her agitation as she replied :

“I must go through with it. He cares for me and I have no right to break his heart for the sake of my own selfish inclination. He has often said that if anything happened to part me from him he would shoot himself, that he would not live without me. I could not risk that, could I?”

“Shoot himself! Ridiculous! Those who threaten suicide are the last to commit it. He is then a coward, as well as a scoundrel, trying to take advantage of you by working on your fears.”

“I believe he means it. And is it generous, do you think, to abuse one who cannot defend himself, Captain Woodward? He may be a weak

man, but I should hardly call him a coward, and your last epithet was unpardonable, I think," and in justice to her absent lover, she rose, drawing herself up, indignant in his defence.

He came quickly across to where she stood.

"I used the word advisedly. You are perhaps aware that the debts which men consider as most dishonourable to leave unpaid are those we call our debts of honour. A few days ago I was playing cards and Delacroix was one of the players. He is a gambler, as perhaps you do not know. He lost heavily, and to me. In payment of his losses he handed me a cheque. Here it is"—he had drawn a pocket-book from his coat while speaking, and handing her the slip of paper, he pointed to the fatal words: "No account." She took it from him, glanced at the signature, then saying:

"May I keep this for twenty-four hours?" turned away.

"You will, I trust, give me credit for having acted so far entirely on your behalf. Now, one word for myself. From the first I knew that you could never have really loved that boy, and I determined to save you from yourself. Of late, I confess, another motive has prompted me to come to you. May I tell you what it is?"

"Not now, some other time, perhaps, but not now. I could not bear it now: please go."

He looked at her, hesitating for an instant, then, as he passed her on his way towards the door, he caught her hand and raised it to his lips. As soon

as he had left her, Gertrude's fortitude gave way, and she burst into tears—tears of thankfulness and of joy. Thankfulness, that now she had something on which to build the hope of release from her self-imposed bonds ; and joy that the man whom she had hardly dared to think of loving, might yet be hers. She looked almost affectionately at the little slip of paper lying in her lap, her reprieve, she thought. Her mother surely could not gainsay that.

* * * * *

The following evening Mrs. Crothers was sitting writing letters in her boudoir. For once she had a night off from the many claims of society, and her husband was busy getting through some papers, working against time to have them ready for a Council Meeting next day, so she was alone.

A white-turbaned domestic suddenly announced that a sahib was below. Would she receive ?

“ What sahib ? ”

“ A soldier sahib, he has no card.”

“ Let him come up,” and to her surprise, Charlie Delacroix entered the room. It struck her as she rose to greet him how sad he looked, and how young to think of matrimony.

“ Mrs. Crothers, I hope you will forgive me for coming at this hour. Miss Aynsley is a friend of yours, that's why I am here.”

“ Yes, I trust there is nothing wrong. She is well, I hope ? ”

“ She is well. I have just left Mrs. Aynsley,

that is why I have come to you. The fact is—I am in great trouble. She has thrown me over, and perhaps if she could hear the truth of the matter, it might still come right. She would listen to you, if you would help me, although she refuses to see me.”

Then he told her the story of the rejected cheque, as it had taken place, and how Captain Woodward had evidently told Gertrude of it, as she believed he had done some dishonourable thing.

“You know, he may not have understood what I said to him, or may have forgotten it; but, anyhow, he should have told me before mentioning it to anyone else. Now it will be difficult to persuade her or anybody that I have not acted like a cad, though, as far as the money goes, he must have known that the debt is quite safe. It is only a question of time for my father to send me whatever I want.”

Mrs. Crothers was silent, gravely considering what he had said. Then she spoke.

“Mr. Delacroix, perhaps it is well that you have come to me, though you may not thank me for what I am going to say. With regard to the cheque, I cannot judge Captain Woodward’s action in the matter—I don’t feel that I am quite in a position to do so, though I think he has not behaved quite fairly to you about that. But it seems to me that if Gertrude loved you as you love her, she would not have been so ready to accept this episode as an excuse to terminate her engage-

ment to you. Now I am going to speak very plainly to you, for I think for both your sakes it is better so. Gertrude does not love you. I am in her confidence, and I know. She would have married you, because she thought that, having promised, she ought not to draw back. But she does not love you, and has longed to be released."

He stared at her fixedly for a moment as though he could not grasp the meaning of what she said. Then he rose and came towards her.

"Is this true? Can it really be the truth?"

"She told me so herself."

"Then nothing matters any more. Good-night, Mrs. Crothers, I am sorry to have troubled you."

She said nothing as he turned and went away, for a sudden, strange look in his eyes disturbed her, the same look that is seen in an animal's eyes when wounded to the death.

An hour later an orderly galloped up to Colonel Aynsley's house. The ladies had retired, and he was smoking a last pipe on the verandah when the sound of the horse's hoofs brought him to the front of the house.

"A letter, sir, from Major Greig."

He took it to the light, and read these few words: "Delacroix has shot himself. Can you come over at once?"

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Many months had passed when Mrs. Crothers and Captain Woodward once more sat together in the shady garden of the club. This time they were

discussing afternoon-tea, and several other small tables were occupied by couples engaged in the same way, at one of which sat Gertrude Aynsley. She had been home to England for six months, as after the shock of her *fiancé's* terribly sudden end, her nerves had been seriously affected, and the doctor had advised a complete change. She had returned a few days previously in blooming health, looking charmingly pretty and bright. Captain Woodward's eyes were fixed on her as he turned to address the lady by his side.

"You are quite right, I have burnt my fingers, but I won my bet."

"The question is whether it was *fairly* won?"

The intonation of her voice rather startled him, and he looked inquiringly at her. She said :

"Perhaps you are not aware that I saw young Delacroix about an hour before he died. He told me the story of a cheque."

"It's an old adage that 'all is fair in love or war.' If it had not been such a desperate case, I should not have used it. I would not have said a word about it, if she had not told me the day was fixed. That is my excuse. But although I feel convinced she cared for me that time we parted on the hills, I could not get her to give me one word of assurance before she left Bombay. She would not let me speak of it. You are her dearest friend, give me a clue. Dare I ask her *now*?"

"I say ask her—and I am afraid, I am very much afraid, you will get far more than you deserve."





MALAY GROUP, JOHOR

PART II

MALAYA

Part II.—MALAYA

THAT BLESSED MOSQUITO

“**D**——N these mosquitos!” I exclaimed aloud in an outburst of indignation ; whereupon my guide and servant, Mat, a cheery and intelligent Malay, ejaculated a confirmatory “Tuan ” (which means “ Master,” but is frequently used as an affirmative in conversation by the Malays), as if he thought he ought to agree, although, as a son of the country, the exasperating little insects had not the power to persecute him as they did me.

I had taken a few days' leave after some weeks of hard work, and had started on a journey of discovery across some unknown jungle country, hoping to bag some game *en route*, and fetch up at a friend's bungalow, who was District Officer in the State adjoining my own. We had trudged far, and had made a fair bag, consisting of some snipe, wild pigeon, and jungle-fowl. In traversing the

paths, through which at times we had been obliged to cut our way, we had seen tracks of deer and bigger game, but the undergrowth was too dense to follow them. And now we had spread our mattresses and set up our curtains, intending to settle down to rest for the night. I was so tired that I should have slept, in spite of high temperature, but for the incursions of these worrying pests that had made their way by some stratagem under the frame of my netting—hence the expletive which had escaped me, and had called forth reiteration from my follower, Mat. I have slumbered through a heavy thunderstorm and an earthquake, and even the frantic yells of a wakeful infant have failed to disturb me when once I was safely in the arms of Morpheus; but the ping of a persistent proboscis-armed monster has a peculiarly rousing effect upon my nerves, and insomnia reigns supreme.

After a short wrestle with the two invaders of my privacy, and a vain attempt at slaughter, I sat up in a spirit of resignation and proceeded to fill and light my pipe, at the same time addressing space, or my faithful Mat, if he happened to be awake.

“I have always been taught, from my earliest childhood, that every creature on God’s earth was created for some good and useful purpose. Will any human being tell me what’s the use of a mosquito?”

To which remark I received an unexpected reply. Mat crawled from under his curtain and approached quite near to where I lay; then squatting on his haunches, he said solemnly in his native tongue :

“I have heard that question before, Tuan (Master), and once I found the answer.”

“Well, Mat, tell me. What’s the good of them, then?”

“It’s a long story, but I will tell Tuan if he likes to hear.”

“Tell on. I’m all attention.”

And this is the tale that he told me. I had often seen the heroine of it (his wife) passing to and fro across the back premises attached to my residence. She was a pretty young Malay woman, aged about twenty years, with a particularly bright and pleasing manner.

“Tuan knows my wife, Katijah; she was a widow when I married her. When we were quite small we lived in the same village near Malacca, and we played together, and I was very fond of her. Then we grew up, and I went to be a servant to a European, and her father married her when she was fourteen to a rich man, who was a cattle-dealer and had plenty of money. He was old, perhaps forty years of age, and ’Tijah could not care for him. He took her away to a place on the coast, where he lived with his brother and sister-in-law, and I did not see her again for many days and weeks. Her husband, Sleiman, used to go away very often to Singapore on business, and every now and then came back home to ’Tijah, bringing the results of his sales with him.

“At last, one day when he had been absent for about three weeks, ’Tijah knew he would soon come again. Her heart was sad, for she always dreaded

his coming, as she did not love him. He was old and ugly—very ugly. He had one long tooth which hung down over his underlip like a tusk, and which gave him a repulsive appearance. 'Tijah hated him. Well, she was sitting idly on the seashore, behind some rocks, looking out over the sea and wishing she could get into the *koleh* (native boat) which lay moored close by, and row across the water to her old home where she had been so happy.

“ Suddenly she heard steps, and became aware of voices conversing in an undertone on the other side of the rocks, which, projecting seaward, concealed her from view, and she recognized that the persons talking were her brother-in-law, Tong, and his wife. She heard that the two were plotting away Sleiman's life. Tong said he had news that his brother would come to-morrow, and that he would have about two hundred dollars with him. They would kill him, and conceal his body, but how to accomplish it without letting 'Tijah know? At the mention of her name, she betrayed her presence by a low cry. In a second the two were upon her, asking her what she did there, and whether she had heard what they had said. Terrified of the wretches, she gasped out that she was sleeping, and their voices startled her, but that she knew nothing of what they had been saying. Tong grasped her by the shoulders, and told her if she was speaking the truth it was well for her; but if not, she had better keep her mouth shut, or he would *b'lager* (a threat). Then they let her go.

“The next day Sleiman arrived, and was greeted with effusion by his relatives. 'Tijah trembled and was silent. She dared not tell him of the danger he was in, but she made up her mind, if she could get the opportunity, to warn him to take care. Till late Sleiman sat outside talking to different neighbours who looked in, and 'Tijah crept away to her room, meaning to lie and watch until Sleiman joined her, but wearied with the alarm and anxiety of the previous night, she fell asleep.

“She awoke with a sudden sense of terror knocking at her heart. By the light of the moon which penetrated through a small window in the hut she saw Sleiman extended by her side ; for a short space of time she heard nothing but the noise of his loud snores, when suddenly a sort of shuffling sound inside the room struck her as something strange. It seemed as though some animal was crawling along the floor, and as she looked with trembling expectancy towards the direction whence it came, the face of Tong slowly rose beside Sleiman from the other side of the low bed on which she lay. She held her breath, hardly daring to keep her eyes fixed on him lest the intensity of her gaze should draw Tong's attention to herself. A flash of something bright, a long-drawn groan, a short struggle, and then a pillow flung over the mouth which was still capable of crying out for help, and brawny muscular arms pressing it firmly down till the convulsive heaving ceased, and all was still as death. 'Tijah closed her eyes with one deep shuddering sigh and fainted.

When she regained her senses, she feared to move or look at first, dreading what ghastly sight would meet her. She put out her hand and felt about cautiously. The dead form of Sleiman was still beside her ; the pillow rested over the face ; in the room no sound, but below, a stealthy passing to and fro—Tong and his wife preparing to get rid of the body.

“Tijah paused, thinking what to do ; then she rose slowly and crept outside. The door of the house was open, and Tong had evidently just gone out. She caught up a *sarong* (skirt) which lay near her on the floor, and flung it over her head ; then, without a backward glance, she fled through the doorway, and ran as fast as her terror-stricken limbs would carry her down to the seashore. It took no time to unfasten the *koleh*, and in a few moments she had grasped the paddle, and had set out in her tiny boat to row over the miles of sea which lay between her and her parent's home in Malacca. It was a frail bark for safety ; but she felt she could trust to it sooner than to those bloodthirsty creatures she had left behind. A long way she rowed, and the next day when the sun got up and scorched her, she pulled in her paddle, and rolled herself in her *sarong* and lay down in the bottom of the boat and slept. She was aroused by the movement of her cockle-shell. It was night ; a breeze had sprung up and a squall was coming ; white crests tipped the waves, and a heavy bank of clouds obscured the starlight, and in a few moments a black pall of darkness enveloped her. The wind

struck the fragile craft, whirling it wildly round, and before she could seize the paddle to try and steady it, the boat capsized, and she was flung into the angry sea. She struck out boldly, and swam about until her hands touched the upturned bark, to which she clung, endeavouring to right it. Poor girl! she knew not where she was, how far from shore, how long her strength would last, and whether there was any hope of succour.

“At last the squall passed over, and the water became comparatively calm, but the moon had not risen, and she could see nothing. She began to get exhausted, and felt that she could not hold on much longer, and would sink and drown unless Tuan Allah took pity on her. She thought sadly that she was young to die, and prayed for help. And Tuan Allah heard her prayer, and sent a messenger to aid her. A small thing as light as a feather touched her cheek—a mosquito, sent to save her life. When she heard the sound which Tuan cursed just now, she knew that land must be quite near, for a mosquito never flies far out to sea. So she let go her anchorage, and making one more effort, swam bravely on, and very soon her feet touched the beach.

“Meanwhile, those cruel murderers had finished their work, and before daylight dawned had got rid of every trace of their ill-doing. The neighbours inquired what had become of Sleiman, and why he had come and gone so suddenly.

“‘Oh,’ said Tong, ‘he left hurriedly; he took ’Tijah with him, and went away in the *koleh* at

daybreak to catch a steamer which would pass there going to Singapore.'

"The village people thought it strange, and shrugged their shoulders for a little and then forgot it. But 'Tijah told the tale to the authorities in Malacca, and the police came over and searched there many days, but could find nothing—only it was thought suspicious that the cattle-dealer should have completely disappeared, and that Tong and his wife should have so much more money.

" 'Ah,' they said, 'Tijah hated us. She lies in what she says. She has got rid of her husband somehow, and meant to steal his money.'

"It was a very mysterious affair, and no one could make out the truth ; but when the police had given up all search, finding they could prove nothing, quite unexpectedly the murder was found out. A man of the village went into the jungle to cut wood, and at mid-day he walked down to the creek to wash after his food. Coming back through the swampy mangrove ground near the river, he noticed a very great swarm of flies ! They were like a cloud, they were so thick. 'What have we here?' he thought ; 'some dead animal, perhaps,' and went to see. Sunk in the mud where the river washed over it at high-tide, he found a barrel, from which proceeded a very nauseous smell. His curiosity was aroused, so he put in his hand, and feeling something hard, he drew it out. It was a skull, the skull of a man, and projecting from the upper jaw was a long tooth, like a tusk. 'Aha !' he cried, 'Sleiman !'

“He went and told the police, and they came and took the cask, and the murder was proved, because the clothes and the tooth were those of Sleiman. So Tong was hanged, and his wife is in prison now in China Gaol in Singapore. She will never come out till she dies.

“And 'Tijah is my wife, and I love her and she loves me, and we are very happy. She is grateful to the mosquito which Tuan d——ns.”

My pipe was finished, and I knocked out the ashes.

“Thank you for your story, Mat, which proves once more the old adage, ‘Murder will out.’ I feel a special interest in Katijah since you have told me her romantic history. And now, perhaps, those blessed mosquitos will let me have some sleep. Anyhow I’ll try, and you had better do so too.”

And as we turned in, Mat murmured once more “Tuan.”

THE PROFESSOR'S MISSING LINK

A SMALL steamer lay almost ready for departure beside one of the wharves at a seaport in the Straits Settlements, a gang of coolies laden with cargo went backwards and forwards along a plank which connected the ship with the shore, and the crew were busy hauling at ropes, preparatory to starting on their voyage.

Just as the last bale of goods had been stowed away, a gharry drove up, and from it descended two passengers. From the top of the vehicle a square wooden box was lifted, and having watched it carried carefully on board the vessel, they followed it down the companion-ladder. One of these men was a European, the other a Malay. The first was dressed in a curiously ill-assorted costume, consisting of a long frock coat, reaching to within a few inches of a pair of brown boots, and showing between it and them a portion of white trouser ; on his head he wore a white straw hat, from the back of which trailed a loose muslin puggree, and above these he carried a large green umbrella as further conducive to shade. The individual in this remarkable get-up was no other than the celebrated Professor Blatheley : short, slight, having a careworn and rather dreamy expression, with no special feature to redeem a plain but clever face, save a pair of keen dark-grey eyes. His companion, the

Malay, was his guide and interpreter, a typical son of the country, with pleasing manners and a bright and intelligent face. Latif was engaged to accompany the learned explorer on his way through the interior of the Native States, where he hoped to come across some of the Sakeis, the wild people who are covered with long hair, like monkeys, and dwell in houses built in the trees.

Besides his follower, Latif, he took with him letters from the Governor of the Settlement commending him to the care of those few rajahs through whose territory he would have to pass *en route*. Thus provided, he was setting out towards an unknown country, where malaria, venomous reptiles, and ferocious quadrupeds conspire together against the life of the enterprising pioneer, determined not to relinquish his purpose till he had succeeded in obtaining the object of his quest.

Far beyond the bounds of civilization, in a clearing surrounded by thick jungle, beneath the shade of betel-nut palms and feathery bamboos, a cluster of huts had been built near one another, forming a Malay Kampong. The inhabitants of this village had been surprised by the unexpected arrival in their midst of two strangers, who, after looking about for a suitable location, had pitched their tent just inside the enclosure.

The natives, as they sauntered slowly towards their daily avocations, at first had gazed somewhat suspiciously at the new-comers ; whilst the women, squatting in their doorways, noticed the Professor's white face and strange attire with a mixture of

wonder and merriment, and their brown-eyed babies, tumbling about at play together, no sooner caught sight of him, than they fled screaming to their respective mothers, no doubt imagining that they had been startled by the sudden appearance of the ghost of Cain. But the community recognised Latif as a fellow-countryman, and after he had told them that the traveller was a great medicine-man seeking knowledge and only intent on good, they became reconciled to his taking up a temporary residence among them, and afterwards greeted him with a smile and a nod as he went out or came in from his excursions into the jungle. Their curiosity as to his various possessions, over which the faithful Latif mounted guard in the tent, was great ; the chief object of interest being the square wooden box, which the Professor always kept locked and the key of it attached to his watch chain. By much insidious questioning they tried to discover what were the contents of this mysterious box, but without success, for Latif had never seen it open, and did not know what it contained. He thought, however, that it must be something very precious, as his master would not let it out of his sight, and always kept it under his folding bedstead. Consequently a whisper gradually circulated that some treasure of great price was locked up within reach, and the report excited the cupidity of several of the Professor's dusky neighbours, among them that of Che Ahman, the headman of the Kampong. He was an old and very ugly Malay, who had lately added to the number of his

wives, past and present, by marrying a young woman from another village, whose name was Meenah. She was undeniably pretty, with round, soft cheeks, large, dark liquid eyes, and a perfect lissome figure, which was not altogether concealed by the long, flowing kabayah which she wore.

Meenah was not unlike the rest of her sex. Her marriage had been more of necessity than choice, and she was somewhat bored by her old husband, so that any distraction from the daily routine of her life was welcome. It was not long, therefore, before she managed to contrive a meeting with Latif, in order to find out what had brought him and the Englishman there. Many were the exclamations with which she greeted his account of the place he had come from, the description of his master's habits, dress, cleverness, etc., and eventually that of the remarkable box which was a closed secret to all.

“Ah! La! What has he there?”

“I know not, and indeed I dare not ask, though it is true that—like you—I would wish to find out.”

“While he sleeps, can you not open it?”

“That would be dangerous, for he keeps a loaded weapon by his side, and might take me for a thief and shoot me.”

“Pah! You are frightened. I am not afraid. Bring me to this white man, and I will talk to him and find out what is in this box.”

“And Ahman? What would he say, if he knew?”

“Ahman !”—and she snapped her fingers. “Pouf ! never mind Ahman ; I will come when he goes to bathe. I will manage him.”

Now, Latif was a good servant, and honest, but, at the same time, he was still of an age to be influenced by the tender glances and bright eyes of a pretty woman, and Meenah’s repeated cajoleries and persuasions at last took effect, so that in spite of a wholesome fear of Che Ahman’s vengeance, he promised to take her to his master’s tent, trusting to her assurances of safety and her woman’s wit to find a way out if any trouble came of it.

A few days later, to Professor Blatheley’s astonishment, he found on entering his abode one evening, after an unusually long ramble out of doors, a young woman seated on the floor, apparently waiting for him, and with every intention of remaining some time. Now the learned man had never contemplated the female of his own kind (except as a skeleton, unassisted by Röntgen rays) ; and the shock of finding one in possession of his tent was such a surprise as almost deprived him of his breath ; but the lady was quite unabashed, and, looking up as he came in, exclaimed, with a smile, “Tabek Tuan” (Good-day), and beckoned him to come closer to her. His first inclination was to bolt, but Latif appearing at the only entrance, began to hastily explain what was her reason for being there, at the same time interpreting her request to be permitted a glance into the interesting box. At first the Professor politely but firmly refused to consider the possibility of

opening it, but whilst Meenah urged Latif afresh to renewed persuasion, it occurred to our friend that this woman might be able, if she chose, and could be made to comprehend what he wanted, to obtain for him the prize he coveted. So, after some parley, he explained that he was studying her language, and that as soon as he was sufficiently proficient to make her understand, he would tell her his secret ; then, should she be kind enough to procure for him that which he required, he would open the box and show her what was inside it. To this she agreed, and the interview came to an end, Latif afterwards escorting her homewards. But, even in that uncivilised and unsophisticated part of the world, Cæsar's wife must be above suspicion if she wishes to retain her good name. The fact of Meenah's visit to the white man's tent unfortunately leaked out, and rumours of her intimacy with one or other of the late arrivals spread from mouth to mouth—only, so far, they had not reached Che Ahman.

A week had passed since Meenah's introduction to the Professor, during which time his studies in Malay had progressed rapidly, the desired result being considerably helped forward by several unlooked-for meetings with the lady, who, bent on achieving her purpose, waylaid him as the opportunity arose and conversed fluently in her own language, the faithful Latif generally at hand to act as interpreter the while.

1 Absorbed in the prosecution of his scientific abours, it never occurred to the Professor that he

was in any way acting foolishly, or incurring risk by his friendliness with the young woman ; and Latif, anxious to stand well in her graces, did not warn him that if Che Ahman should hear of it his position might be perilous.

One evening, at twilight, Meenah was lying coiled up on a mat in the verandah of her house, when, peeping from under the covering which enveloped her, she saw Che Ahman go down the steps of it and towards the path which led to the well, which was their bathing-place. Immediately afterwards, two other men came out from their respective dwellings and disappeared after him, following closely at his heels. It occurred to Meenah that she had seen these same men follow her husband the day before, and it dawned on her that possibly they might be plotting some mischief. Rising hastily, and drawing her sarong closely over her face, she slipped out at the back of the house, and with stealthy footsteps crept through the short growth of jungle which bordered the path leading down to the well. Arrived there, she heard voices behind the pagar (screen) conversing in low tones, and, stooping down, she listened. " Ha ! there is treachery ! " she thought, as she caught the words " white man," " treasure," and then " box " ; and she drew still closer, striving to catch what they said, when the diabolical conspiracy was disclosed to her. That very night they were going to make a raid on the Professor's tent, kill him, and carry off the box. If Latif proved troublesome, they would murder him, too,

though they thought it probable that he would be easily silenced by the bribe of a share in the plunder.

“And Meenah?” said one of the Malays; “she is in league with this stranger. She meets him and talks with him. How shall we quiet her?”

“That is my affair,” said her husband, sternly. “I will deal with her afterwards. She will soon know how to hold her tongue.”

Meenah's heart grew cold, for she knew that if her husband's jealousy were aroused there would be short reckoning for her. With cheeks that had blanched suddenly under her brown skin she retreated towards her dwelling, turning over in her mind all the while how she could warn the Englishman, resolved to do that at any cost, even though she might lose her life in the endeavour to save his. She dared not go straight to him, for her husband would be back from his ablutions almost immediately, and be ready to eat rice with her, and she could not be absent then. Afterwards, however, he might sleep, and she might perhaps escape for a few minutes to say a word of warning to Latif or his master.

Through the evening meal Che Ahman was unusually grave and silent, his eyes fixed on her face, as though he could read her thoughts, and knew the anxiety which possessed her. After supper she lay down as if to go to rest, but to her dismay Che Ahman came and stretched himself beside her, so that, even if he slept, she dared not move without the chance of waking him. The moments

seemed like hours as they crept by, as consumed with suspense Meenah lay there, listening to the insect noises from the jungle, and the hooting of night birds in the trees, wondering how she could communicate with those in such imminent peril of their lives, and yet powerless to help them. At last her husband stirred, then rose quietly and went out; in a second she had passed swiftly across the verandah into an inner room, where she snatched up a parang (long knife) which lay there, and in another moment was gone, running swiftly through the darkness towards the Professor's tent, fear lending her feet wings as they flew over the ground.

Latif had erected an impromptu sleeping place, formed of a board with a mat on it, and a kajang spread overhead to keep off the dew, and on this hard bed he lay asleep. Meenah shook him violently, at the same time putting her hand over his mouth to prevent his calling out. He awoke at once and sat up, staring at her.

“There is treachery. Run to the back of my house and wait there. I will come to you directly with the Englishman.”

Never doubting her honesty, he did not hesitate, and almost as soon as she had spoken he had disappeared into the lalang grass which fringed the jungle behind where he was lying, and at the same instant Meenah vanished at the back of the tent. She was too wise to go in by the entrance, for she knew the plotters would creep in that way, and that coming out she might meet them. With a

well-directed blow from the sharp parang she cut a long slit in the canvas, through which she passed, and the next minute was bending over the Professor, sleeping soundly on his bed. She roused him as she had Latif, and whispered :

“Come with me, Tuan (my lord) ; they mean to kill you, but I will save your life. Come ! oh, come quickly !” and, seizing him by the arm, while he caught up his revolver lying near, she dragged him after her through the opening she had made, threading her way through the low jungle as speedily as possible to where Latif stood waiting for them. There she told them in a few hasty words of the conspiracy she had overheard, and begged them to fly before it was too late. She left them for a brief moment, returning almost immediately with a few native cakes, tied up in a kerchief, which she pressed them to take lest they should starve by the way, then she placed the parang in Latif's hand, and gave a kris (dagger) to the Professor, as additional protection from wild beasts should they come across any in their wanderings, and with some directions as to the route they should follow, she urged them to depart without delay, and to travel as rapidly as they could while the darkness still served to befriend them.

Meanwhile, within five minutes of the Professor's retreat, three dark forms, carrying long spears, crept on all fours noiselessly one after the other through the entrance of the tent, and felt their way cautiously over the ground towards the bed. As

their fingers touched the edge of it, they rose simultaneously, and drove their spears again and again through the unresisting mattress. In their eagerness to decamp with their booty, without waiting to see the effect of this treatment on the victim they supposed was lying there, or stopping to wonder why no groan or sigh escaped him in his death agony, they dragged the coveted box from underneath, and, carrying it out, hurried towards the hut occupied by one of the would-be murderers. There, having carefully fastened up the door, they prepared to break it open, thinking with exultation that the much-desired treasure was safe within their grasp. A couple of sharp blows burst the lock, and they raised the lid with greedy expectation, then started back with exclamations of horror and disgust. Rows of ghastly toothless skulls grinned at them from the divisions in which each specimen had been separately packed, and on the frontal bone of each a white label had been carefully affixed, on which was written in clear letters its scientific description in Latin.

Poor Professor ! To him who had spent years of mental labour and physical fatigue in travel, endeavouring to prove his theory respecting the "Ascent of Man," these relics had been infinitely precious. To the dastardly ruffians who would have murdered him for the sake of supposed plunder, they were mere dust and ashes. No wonder they dropped the lid with haste over the grinning skulls, which seemed to jeer at them from the portable grave in which they had rested !

Professor Blatheley returned safely in due time to the port from which he had set out so hopefully in search of that "missing link," which should have rendered his theory complete. Latif's guidance and his own powers of endurance achieved this ; but although thankful to have escaped with his life, and remembering with gratitude the kind services of Meenah, the pretty Malay woman, he still cherishes an undying regret that his valuable "Thesaurus Craniorum" was lost to him.

The box and its contents, together with the disappearance of its owner and his guide, remained an inexplicable mystery to Che Ahman. Whether the absence of his hated rival sufficed to quell the fierceness of his jealousy, or whether he was influenced by the fear that he might become a laughing-stock to his neighbours did the failure of his murderous attempt become known, it is impossible to say. But certain it is that, when Che Ahman entered his wife's room that night, he found her apparently sleeping soundly and peacefully, and from that time she never heard a word from him about the Englishman or the wooden box.

ABSENT WITHOUT LEAVE

MID-DAY in a Malay village ; the seniors are taking their siesta after a meal of curry and rice, with dried fish to give it a flavour ; some juveniles of various ages and sexes are playing together, making mud pies in the loose damp soil under the attap-roofed huts ; and on the steps of one of these a woman squats, nursing her brown-eyed baby while she watches alternately the children at their games, and her sleeping spouse, who lies extended near her within the small verandah of the house. Further along, in front of a rather superior-looking dwelling, which is evidently the property of a man of some means, a young girl is stooping over a flat basket containing grain, which she is leisurely employed in sifting, accompanying her movements by humming a sort of sing-song under her breath. The sun is directly overhead, the stump of a bamboo throwing no shadow ; and the atmosphere outside the Kampong radiates with intense heat, while beneath it a sort of torpidity appears to have befallen the inhabitants, which affects even the girl's actions and her song, as she sifts and hums with a slow and drowsy air. For a Malay, her face is a pretty one. She has large soft gazelle-like eyes, and a smooth satiny skin, and her

features have a refinement somewhat unusual in that type of countenance, showing the probability of a mixture of Indian or Arab blood. She wears the sarong (skirt), the ordinary Malay costume, but unaccompanied by the kabayah (coat) which is generally worn with it ; her skirt being fastened just below the armpits, covering her breast while suggesting its fullness, and displaying the roundness of her neck and shoulders.

Suddenly there is a stir amongst the few wakeful members of the community. The children separate hurriedly and bolt towards their various homes, disappearing like rabbits into their holes, and the woman draws her coat over the infant in her arms, while she rises and moves towards the inner room with her burden. At the same moment the young girl pauses in her occupation, raising her head to listen to a sound which approaches nearer and nearer through the cocoanut palms, whose branches throw their shade over the wooden huts beneath.

A buggy drawn by a fast-trotting pony is coming along the road which skirts the jungle and passes through the centre of the small village. A young fellow is driving ; English, unmistakably, by his dress and appearance ; a brown moustache conceals his upper lip, and hair of a darker shade is cropped close under his solah topee. A syce stands behind the trap, holding on by a strap from the hood at the back of it, ready at a moment's notice to spring off to do his master's bidding. The pony steps out well, and passes quickly through the quiet village, but not too

rapidly for the Englishman to catch a smiling glance from the eyes of the Malay girl as she looks towards him from her stooping position, together with an almost imperceptible motion of her hand as she raises it to her forehead, as though to shield her eyes from a gleam of sunshine, as he goes by. The instant he has gone, she springs up and enters the house, from which she emerges at the back of it, having caught up a second sarong *en route*, to use as a head covering as she runs along the road over which the buggy has gone, and which by this time is quite out of sight. She makes good speed in the same direction, and turning a corner, comes upon the trap drawn up at one side, the syce holding the pony, his master seated on a fallen tree a little further off, patiently awaiting her while he smokes a cigarette to pass the time.

“Ha ! little one, how goes it? Is gran’pa still obdurate, or have you worked the oracle and persuaded him to bring you into my Kampong one of these first days to see my house?”

“How can that be, sir?” she replied, as he took her hand and drew her down on the log beside him. “*Naenik* (grandfather) will never consent to my following an English master. But listen ; a terrible thing has happened for me. Indeed, I am most miserable since I saw you last. Be sorry for me, be sorry for me,” and bursting into tears, she laid her head upon his shoulder in a sudden abandonment of grief.

“Ketchil, poor little soul ; why, what’s the matter? Don’t cry, dear, I can’t bear to see you

so unhappy. Come, cheer up, and tell me what is wrong" ; and to enable him the better to comfort her and stop her weeping, he took her in his arms and repeatedly kissed away the tears as they fell. This prescription seemed to achieve the desired result, for by degrees her sobs grew quieter, and she found words in which to express her woe.

She was to be married ; her grandfather had told her that a rich Arab from Malacca had been to see him and had made an offer for her. This Arab would pay a great deal, very many dollars to make her his wife ; and alas ! she had no choice, she must give up her Englishman whom she loved with all her heart, and go away with this Arab, far away to Klang or Malacca, or Singapore—and he was old and ugly, and had other wives, and she was sure he would be cruel to her. What could she do ! Alas ! could he not help her in some way or another ?

The Englishman looked thoughtful and grave, and said nothing for some minutes, while her head lay upon his shoulder, and her soft arms clung round his neck ; then his cigarette was smoked out, and he spoke to her.

" I dare say your gran'pa thinks he is acting wisely, and doing the best he can for you in giving you to this man. He is rich, and you must marry, or when the old people die you will be left all alone with no **one** to take care of you, and that would never do, would it, little one ? But he does not know that I love you, and would marry you to-morrow, if I could. But it is difficult, and impos-

sible to be done in a hurry. You see, Ketchil, our people do not marry Malays. And I can't take you away from your gran'pa, for I have no money to give him for you, not as much as this rich Arab could, and there would be trouble for all of us, you, and me and gran'pa, if I took you away without his consent. You must let me think what I can do, and I will see you again in a day or two, and tell you if I can help you. And now, good-bye, little woman, for you must run back or you will be missed ; and if you were found with me, you might have to suffer for it. Meet me a little beyond this at sunset the day after to-morrow, and I will tell you what we shall do."

And with this promise Ketchil had to be satisfied, though she parted unwillingly from her lover, and he watched her as she slowly retraced her steps, whilst continually looking round, till a bend in the road hid her retreating figure from his sight.

Basil Ruliston was a civilian ; young, clever and hard-working, and full of the ardour and confidence of youth. His appointment was in the Native States, where he shared a newly-built substantial-looking house, with two or three other Europeans who lived in the station ; and his work, as superintendent of the tin mines situated some miles off in the country, took him constantly through the Malay village where his lady-love, Ketchil, lived, supported by an old couple who called themselves her grandparents. The old man was, for a Malay, well-to-do enough ; being the owner of extensive padi-fields surrounding his

house, and having made some profit by the construction of grass mats, for which he found a ready sale. His wife was aged and infirm ; a hideous old Malay woman, who appeared to be deaf and somewhat imbecile, not a very pleasing chaperon for poor Ketchil, who spent her time, in consequence, as much as possible away from her home.

Basil had met her shortly after he had taken up his appointment, carrying a heavy load of broken wood along the road one afternoon, on a return drive from one of his visits of inspection ; and the bright soft eyes and plaintive expression of her drooping mouth had at once appealed to him. He drew his pony up beside her, with the usual greeting, "*Tabek*" (good-day), to which she responded by a smile, while she deposited her bundle on the ground, exclaiming, "Where are you going, sir?"

"Going your way, little one. That bundle is too heavy for you. My syce shall carry it for you. Jump in here by me, and I'll drive you home again."

Such an act was an unprecedented piece of gallantry on the part of a European towards a native in the East, and had it been reported at headquarters might have made things somewhat unpleasant for the young man. But Basil was a pioneer in that line of country, and seeing a slim, small damsel toiling along under a burden which was, as he thought, too heavy for her, it seemed to him only right and chivalrous to offer her a lift. And Ketchil was pleased to accept the honour so graciously accorded her, while the syce was too accustomed to his master's vagaries to refuse to

carry out his orders. So Ali got down from his perch and laughingly hoisted the bundle on to his shoulders, following the buggy on foot, the pony proceeding at walking pace so that Basil might have all the longer to enjoy the society of the fair Malay.

By the time they reached the entrance to the village, Basil had completely lost his heart to his companion, whose piquant manner and pretty face he thought perfectly charming.

This was the beginning of many meetings during the ensuing few weeks ; and to Ketchil the days had seemed like one bright expanse of sunshine, until the cloud arose on the horizon of her happiness, which she had just confided to her English lover with such complete despair.

As Basil drove on towards his quarters he pondered over what could be done. If he were to do what he wished, he would have married her, but for numberless reasons that seemed impossible. His mess-mates would laugh him to scorn ; and his mother—well ; somehow his mother and Ketchil seemed rather incongruous—he feared that would never do. And yet he really loved this girl with all the intensity of a youth's first passion, and the idea of her being sold to an Arab years older than herself, and having to share the honours of wedlock with more than one rival in the harem, caused him so great a feeling of repulsion that he determined he would prevent it, whatever the cost might be, but he knew it would be useless appealing to her old grandfather, Dris.

All that evening he was silent and thoughtful, and his mess companions rallied him on his abstraction.

Lying in a long chair after dinner smoking a cigar and pretending to read the latest home paper, an idea suddenly struck him.

"I have it—the Convent at Penang! But would she go there, and can I be sure that they'd take her in, if I were to succeed in smuggling her away from here? I think they would, for all's grist that comes to their mill. It need only be a temporary arrangement, and 'twould save her from this hateful marriage, at any rate. Who knows! The Arab might die, or old Dris, or something. I'll try it anyhow, if only I can persuade her to do as I wish," and with this intention fixed in his mind, he turned into his own room to sleep upon it, resolved to make his final plans when he had seen the lady, and secured her consent.

If she consented, he could drive her by night right away down to Port Douglas, just in time for the morning boat for Penang, which always started at daylight; and with a fresh pony, he could get back to his own quarters by eleven o'clock, and be in office very little later than was his usual custom, and no one (except Ali) need be the wiser. Ali, he believed, was to be trusted; he was obedient and faithful, and would not betray them, he felt sure. Besides, he could make it worth this man's while to hold his tongue.

* * * * *

A week later there was grave consternation in

Basil Ruliston's mess. To the surprise of his subordinates, he had not appeared in his office at the usual hour, but they assumed, as the day wore on and he did not come, that his non-appearance must be due to illness of some sort, and proceeded through the usual routine of business as well as they could without him. The three Europeans who shared his house had separated after breakfast to go about their various duties, with a mere comment on his absence, supposing he had been out somewhere perhaps the previous night, and so was later in getting up that morning than usual. But when on re-assembling for dinner Basil was not to be found, they became uneasy ; still more so, when the faithful Ali presented himself with an anxious countenance and said his master had disappeared and he feared some accident had happened to him. On questioning the syce further, he told them he had received orders the previous day to harness one of his master's ponies and leave it ready for him in the stable that night at 6 p.m., and then to proceed with the other pony nine miles out into the country, to the Rest-house on the road to Port Douglas, and there to await the coming of his master, who would probably arrive about 6 a.m. next day. He had waited there until four in the afternoon, and as his master had not appeared, he had walked the pony back to its own stable, and found that Ruliston had not been seen or heard of since the previous day. Here the fellow broke down, and declared, with tears in his eyes, that he believed the "*Tuan*" (master) had been murdered.

“Murdered ! Rubbish ! Who should murder him ? He has not an enemy in the place.”

But Ali answered :

“Don’t be angry, sir, but you are wrong. My master had an enemy.”

By slow degrees, and after much patient enquiry, they elicited from the man such information as he could give. He told them of Basil’s attraction in the Malay village, and of Ketchil’s other admirer, the rich Arab, whom her grandfather said she must marry. Ali had heard from a reliable source that this Arab had been seen in the house of Dris the afternoon of the previous day, having an altercation with the girl who had said again and again that she would not marry him ; high words had passed between the three, and eventually Ketchil had declared that she loved a white man, and that she would *ikôt* (follow) the Englishman or no one, and had rushed out of the house crying bitterly. Since then she had not been seen nor heard of, and what was more astonishing still, both the Arab and Dris had disappeared. These two had sat long together in close discussion after Ketchil’s exit, and, moreover, Ali had been told that the Arab had many dollars with him, and was prepared to pay a large sum down for the girl. The people in the village supposed that he and Dris had followed Ketchil, and carried her away with them. Basil had been last seen about 8 p.m. driving his buggy towards the village, and Ali expressed his belief that Dris with his wealthy friend had come on Basil Ruliston while waiting

for Ketchil in the darkness, and killed him, and hidden his body in the jungle.

The result of this conversation was that, having reported the affair to the Magistrate in the place, the whole party proceeded to the Malay Kampong, to try and discover some clue to the mystery. The house of Dris was closed, but they hammered vigorously at the door, bringing out into the roadway every member of the Kampong, who gazed open-mouthed at the white men, wondering what had happened. As no reply was vouchsafed to their repeated summons, the door was forced, and they entered. In the inner room they found the old hag, nominally Ketchil's grandmother, who rose from the floor with difficulty and surveyed them with blinking eyes, her palsied limbs supported by a stick she carried. To all their remarks she merely replied by imbecile gestures, a shaking head, and the aggravating repetition of that refuge of the Malay, "*Untar*" (don't know) and at length they came to the conclusion it was mere waste of time to attempt to question her.

They could elicit no further information from the onlookers than what they had already heard from Ali, and they had to return without obtaining any fresh account of what had happened, leaving an order for the search of the surrounding jungle. Then Ali with a messenger was despatched to Port Douglas to make enquiries there. To their consternation he returned bringing with him Ruliston's pony and trap, and saying he had heard that two natives and a girl had gone on board the

steamer for Penang the morning of his master's disappearance ; but how the pony and trap had got there, or where the individuals in question had come from, no one seemed to know. No doubt they had arrived at Port Douglas in the night, and had gone on board in the darkness.

This evidence seemed almost conclusively to confirm the suspicion of foul play ; the Arab with the man Dris had probably met Ruliston with the girl, and having disposed of him, had no doubt used his carriage to reach the Port, from thence to get safely away from British jurisdiction. They might easily leave the steamer at one of the small calling-places on the coast, and disappear in the interior before there was a chance of tracing them.

That evening the search party returned with the worst news. Some way from Dris' house, on the road towards Port Douglas, and hidden in the jungle, far beyond the Malay Kampong, they had found something which appeared to be a body. It had evidently been stripped, the head was gone, and the corpse was much decomposed, the incursions of various scavengers of the soil, having made it impossible to identify what remained ; there seemed little doubt, however, that this was what had once been Basil Ruliston, and that a dastardly murder had been committed. The necessary arrangements were made for interring the body, and in due form, following an inquest, the funeral service was read ; the coffin being buried in a small portion of ground which had been set

apart for the purpose ; for, until then, there had been no European interment in that part of the country.

Five days had now elapsed since the fatal evening when Basil Ruliston had set forth in all happy anticipation to meet his lady love, and give her safe conduct as far as the steamer for Penang. During the two following days the matter was reported at head quarters, and the authorities had telegraphed home, that he had disappeared, and that there were reasons to fear he had been murdered. Endeavours were still being made to discover the whereabouts of the missing Dris, the Arab merchant and the granddaughter, but without avail.

A week had passed, and Ruliston's messmates were seated at dinner, a vacant chair marking the place where he had sat hitherto at the table with them. Suddenly wheels were heard coming up the short drive in front of the house, and a conveyance which had once been a hack gharri, but was now in a most ram-shackle condition was seen approaching, and presently drew up under the portico. Visitors were unusual in this out-of-the-way spot ; but, taking it for granted that some traveller had found his way to their door, and was anticipating the hospitable reception which is generally accorded to strangers in the East, one of the party ordered the boy who was waiting on them, to see who the new arrival could be.

Before the servant had crossed the room the individual in the gharri had descended from it,

and was entering the doorway, and at the same time their native servant fell back with a cry of alarm. The three men seated at table rose to their feet with a thrill of horror, aghast at the unexpected apparition, for before them stood the ghost of Basil Ruliston. At least so they believed it to be, till he flung his cap into a chair, exclaiming :

“ I’ve got here at last. I thought I never should reach the end of my journey, the wretched conveyance came to pieces continually on the way, and the poor brute in the shafts could hardly crawl. You got my telegram, I hope, and have made things right for me with the powers that be ? ”

All this they listened to in silence, unable at first to recover their equanimity sufficiently to say anything at all. But now one of them exclaimed : “ Telegram ! No, we never had any telegram. We thought you were dead.”

“ No telegram ! Then I’m in for a pretty mess, I expect—absent for a whole week without leave.”

“ Absent without leave ! Why, my dear fellow, we thought you were murdered, and we’ve buried you out there, with all the honours.”

By degrees the whole story was told on both sides, and this was the gist of Basil Ruliston’s narrative.

He had carried out his plan of meeting the Malay girl in order to drive her to Port Douglas, as the preliminary step towards placing her under the protection of the nuns in the Convent at Penang. To avoid recognition, he had discarded his

European habiliments and had adopted the *sarong* and coat of the Malay ; and on arrival at the Red House, finding his syce with the second pony had not turned up, he elected to push on to Port Douglas, intending to change ponies on the return journey instead.

On reaching the latter place, he found the steamer was not to sail for two hours, so he had tied up his pony under the shelter of a hut near the landing-place, and had gone off in a small boat with his lady-love, intending to keep her company on board until the ship was about to start. Ketchil was quite prepared to face incarceration in the Convent, on the promise that Basil would find some means for her release before long. So averse was she to selling her freedom to her grandfather's old friend, that even temporary imprisonment seemed preferable to such a fate. The time passed quickly, and the sound of the heaving of ropes brought Basil from the cabin he had secured for Ketchil, and together they went up on deck ; to their amazement and horror, they came face to face with Dris, who was standing leaning against the bulwarks, watching the preparations of the native boatman to let go the ship. He pounced on the girl, seizing her with some violence, while he hurled a volume of abuse and scolding at Basil, who stood momentarily speechless, completely taken by surprise. Seeing that the loud voice and violent manner of Dris was attracting attention, Basil asked him to come into the saloon, and there discuss matters more quietly, and the man acceded

to this request. He then insisted that Basil should immediately relinquish the girl and give her up to his custody, at the same time demanding of him how he dared take her away, and asking what he had meant to do with her. Basil explained that it was her own choice to leave her home, and that he was only doing what he could to help her in achieving her purpose. He tried to reason with the old man, and the discussion grew so warm that it was some while before Basil remembered that he had not meant to be a passenger on the boat, and that it was important he should get ashore before the ship started. Glancing at his watch, he was horrified to see what the hour was, and he sprang to his feet and rushed on deck, only to find that the steamer had already started, and that Port Douglas was little more than a speck in the dim distance, all that could now be seen of it was a bright spot of light where the sun caught the tin roof above the landing-place.

He tried by persuasion, bribery, and threats, to induce the captain to put back for him, but everything was alike useless, and he had to make up his mind to go on to the first port of call, from whence he hoped to get a conveyance or boat to take him back to Port Douglas, which he might not do till the following day or the day after, according to the pleasure of the captain.

Meanwhile, Dris had driven Ketchil back to her cabin, mounting guard outside of it, and refusing to allow her any communication with Basil when he returned to the small saloon. He stood for a

long time by the old ruffian, urging him to permit her to come out and talk to them, and promising not to take advantage of it, if only he would not shut her up. Dris then offered to sell the girl to him for a preposterous amount in dollars, at the same time curtly refusing him access to her until the bargain was concluded. Finding that Basil negatived this proposition, he informed Ruliston that he should take Ketchil ashore at the next stopping-place (where they were due about six a.m.), but that he should see her for a few moments to say good-bye before parting. Resting on this assurance, there was nothing to be done but to make the best of his circumstances, so he passed the day chatting to the crew, and sleeping at intervals. The earlier hours of the night he spent in walking up and down, cursing the bad luck which had placed him in such an awkward fix; and eventually tired out, he stretched himself on the deck and fell fast asleep.

When he awoke it was broad daylight, and the little steamer was puffing along merrily, a line of shore just visible to starboard not very far off. Basil got up, and after stretching himself and taking a look round, he descended to the saloon, and found to his surprise and pleasure, that Dris was no longer on watch. With two steps he was at the cabin door, calling to Ketchil in low tones to open to him; there was no reply, and he turned the handle and went in, only to find that the bird had flown. His heart beat fast with apprehension, and he ran up on deck anxious to find out what

had become of her and the old man. A Malay sailor at the wheel, in reply to his enquiry, answered with a cunning leer :

“Dris? He has gone. We slowed down for him three hours ago, and signalled for a boat to take him and his daughter ashore over yonder. We don't stop again till we get to Penang. What must you do, Tuan? Well, just wait patiently till you get there.”

It was clear that Dris had taken the captain into his confidence, and given him his own account of what were the relations between Basil and his granddaughter. Probably he had bribed the man heavily to put him ashore, and to carry Basil on to Penang, for no persuasion could induce him to stop anywhere until the steamer reached that port a day later. From there Ruliston wired to his mess entreating them to make things square with the authorities, promising to explain everything later. But this telegram had somehow been stopped in transit, due probably to the temporary absence of the Eurasian clerk in charge; however, it did not reach its destination for some hours after Basil had appeared. Fortunately, his chief was a good-natured civilian, who, on receiving full particulars of what had occurred, did his utmost to hush up the affair and prevent its becoming public.

Ketchil and old Dris were heard of no more. It was almost a certainty that the body found was that of the Arab, who had been foully murdered by the wretch who pretended to be his friend, for

the sake of the dollars he was known to have carried with him.

No doubt the meeting with Basil and his granddaughter was as great a surprise to the old ruffian as it had been to them ; for he had probably gone on board the steamer hoping to get away with his loot, and afterwards intended to hide somewhere till he was certain that his crime had not been found out. The disappearance of Ketchil was a sad termination to Basil's first love affair, but since then he has found a new and more suitable attachment while on leave in the old country. And his mother has never known what a narrow escape she had, at one time, of becoming the mother-in-law of a daughter of an alien race.

CHE-MEENA

A TROPICAL day of toil and heat had come to an end, and I lay extended in a long chair in my verandah, a cold drink beside me, my pipe between my lips.

My Boy, by name Mat Asan, moved quietly about the house, shutting up for the night. He was a clever, good-natured fellow, a first-rate servant, with a cheery, pleasant manner ; remarkably so, in my opinion, under the untoward circumstances of a rather old and very ugly wife.

Che-Meena ruled Mat Asan as only Mohammedan women can rule their husbands, with a rod of iron, “ *Hamba-ta-mau* ” (Your slave does not wish it) having greater influence over a Benedick in that country than an Imperial edict over an unruly crowd at home.

Che-Meena was not only wife, but she professed to have attained the doubly dignified position of witch-doctor ; she declared she had inherited this right from her ancestors, and she upheld the tradition by the observance of mysterious séances in her own premises within the compound of my

bungalow. The chief features of these ceremonies were apparently a religious dimness in her apartment, accompanied by a strong odour of incense, and a monotonous chanting to the rhythmical drumming of tom-toms about three feet in diameter, which produced a considerable amount of sound.

I listened to Mat Asan as, after closing the outer door, his departing footsteps trod the stairs with the almost noiseless shuffle of bare feet ; and it occurred to me to wonder why he and Che-Meena had not seemed, lately, so thoroughly in accord as of old.

Mat Asan was no new broom ; he had been with me for some years, during which time he had proved himself to be a faithful and trustworthy attendant. His wife had kept a careful eye to my comfort ; and I knew I had to thank her deft fingers for the darning of socks and the mending of sundry garments, with the replacement of lost buttons on shirts, all ruthlessly torn off or destroyed by the unscrupulous Dhoby.

This joint service had worked well for me until the last week or so, when I began to perceive the signs of a “rift within the lute.” The harmony between the pair had been marred since a two days’ visit to her brother, which Che-Meena had paid about that time ; and, to my intense astonishment, a few days previously, I had heard Mat Asan exclaim abruptly in response to some remark from his respected spouse, “*Diam !*” (Shut up), an unparalleled outburst of rebellion on his part.

I said to myself, “Human nature the same all

the world over," even the most patient of worms will turn.

Some weeks passed, and the friction continued. The previously united couple were evidently not getting on as happily as before, and I began to suspect a reason for the change. Unexpectedly I made the discovery which explained the position of affairs.

I had been walking across to Head-quarters, and was taking a short cut back to my office, down a side street in the town. The jalousies of a doorway in a native house above me stood open, and as I passed I heard a laugh.

That laugh I could have sworn to among a thousand.

As I glanced upwards Mat Asan drew back, but leaning over the wooden balustrade was the slim figure of a girl. She wore the usual costume of the Malay, a *sarong* and *kabayah*, but she was unmistakably a Siamese, for her face showed the usual characteristics of that race ; a creamy complexion almost white, and large dark flashing eyes, whose brilliancy told me a tale which I had read before. Consumption is a disease only too common amongst native women, and those unnaturally bright eyes betokened the fatality of a premature death.

The quarrels between Mat Asan and Che-Meena were no longer a matter of surprise. No doubt the former's insubordination was due to the influence of this new attraction. Che-Meena must have heard of these meetings—hence the frequent

storms of words ; but Love the Conqueror had given her hitherto obedient husband and slave the courage to resist persuasion and defy threats, and remonstrance had clearly been in vain.

The following evening after I had made this discovery, Che-Meena's indignation reached its climax. Her voice, raised about five octaves above its normal pitch, raged for hours at the unfortunate Mat Asan, who, however, replied at intervals only with a few calm or almost apologetic words. At last her spleen seemed to exhaust itself, or else I fell asleep, for I heard nothing more until I awoke next morning.

That day I had occasion to send Mat Asan some distance on business, which necessitated his being away that night. The same afternoon Che-Meena went out, returning when darkness was falling, bringing with her two old women and a man, who carried mysterious-looking parcels into her house. They disappeared into the shadowy dimness of her room, and I guessed that some religious rite was about to take place, probably prayers for the intervention of spirits to bring about the subservience of the absent Mat Asan.

Judging by the din that followed throughout the better part of the night, these worthies must have been summoning all the witches in their calendar, and a review of every supernatural agent from the spirit world of their acquaintance.

For a while afterwards Che-Meena hardly addressed her husband, but I saw her watching him sullenly, and I perceived that something was

beginning to produce the desired effect ; though whether this was due to the séance already described, or to some other cause, it was not possible to say.

Mat Asan began to hang his head ; he walked sadly, and his depression increased day by day, while his courage appeared to wane. Then Che-Meena's shrill tones commenced once more, but they no longer drew a protest from him.

What did it mean ? Was some magnetic influence at work upon the man, or was some overwhelming sorrow crushing his spirit and breaking his heart.

I felt a little anxious about him, but hesitated to speak to him on the subject, fearing to probe a mortal wound.

One day he came to me at my office ; grief was imprinted on his face, and he saluted me with an unusually deep salaam.

My long experience of natives and their ways told me a favour would be asked.

“ Well, Mat, what can I do for you ? ”

“ Master will be sorry for me. Master will lend me ten dollars ? ”

“ You want to borrow ten dollars, what shall you do with it, Mat ? ”

“ The reading of the Death Dirge costeth much, O Master.”

I handed him the coin without a word, and he crept silently away.

So the owner of that pretty face with the bright dark eyes had passed to the silent land, and the romance of Mat Asan's life was ended.

And now Che-Meena's reputation is assured as the greatest witch-doctor from Mount Hijau to the Perak River, and Mat Asan is rebellious no more.

A TRAGIC COURTSHIP

THE heat of a tropical day was over, and the sun was fast sinking below the far-off rim of the horizon, casting a golden glow across the sea, and darkening the shadows of the mangroves which fringed the margin of the shore. Inland, behind the swampy ground, rose a range of hills, at the foot of which, far away in the distance, could be seen the attap roof of a bungalow in the centre of a stretch of cultivated ground, showing that Man had set his mark there, and beyond and behind it thick jungle closed the view with tall trees reaching to the sky.

On the near slope was a plantation where the broad smooth leaves of the coffee bushes, and a mass of star-like blossoms, showed promise of a rich harvest for their owner; and picturesquely perched upon a hill above them, looking out over the surrounding country and the sea, was another bungalow, on the steps of which sat the silent and solitary figure of a woman.

Her face was beautiful, but thin and pale, and care had drawn some lines round her expressive mouth; her eyes, gazing pensively out through the fast-fading sunlight, were soft and dreamy, and of a deep shade of grey. Her brow was

clouded by some sad thought, and as she leant her head against the post of the verandah, whilst her hands clasped her knees, her attitude seemed one of dejection and of weariness. A few minutes previously she had been wandering along the foot-path which could be seen from where she sat, winding in and out among the coffee trees ; but then she was not alone, and she could still see through the semi-darkness the figure of the man who had been her companion, making his way towards the other bungalow which was his home.

During the past year and a half a great change had come over Marion Scrivener's life. Before that, she lived in a small village in England with her old father, who doted on her, and she had never known a thought of anxiety or trouble of any kind, until suddenly her devoted parent died. In his last moments he entreated her to seek a home with her only living relative, his son, who had gone away eastward many years before to seek a fortune in a foreign land.

"Write and tell Tom that you will come to him, that I leave you in his care. God bless you, my darling," were her father's last words.

And so, as soon as her great grief had somewhat abated, she considered what she ought to do, and eventually wrote to her brother, whom she hardly remembered, not having seen him for many years, telling him what the old man's wishes respecting her had been. In reply she received a rambling epistle in which the discomforts of a planter's life were set forth, as also the





BUKIT TANGAH PASS, SUNGHIE UJONG.

unfitness of his household arrangements for the reception of a lady ; but at the same time he added that, if she could make up her mind to face these drawbacks and rough it, he would not refuse to give her the home for which she asked.

And so, somewhat against the advice of her few friends, but because of her father's wish expressed when he was dying, she said good-bye to the place where she had spent the happy years of girlhood, and went out to join Tom in his bachelor establishment abroad.

She found that the plantation on which he was part owner was situated on a narrow neck of cultivated land, separated by twenty miles of water from the nearest port under English government, with which they had infrequent communication when produce had to be shipped, or stores and pay for the coolies had to be obtained ; and that, with the exception of Dick O'Brien, her brother's partner, and co-manager of the estate, she was completely cut off from European society.

After a while, the loneliness and the need of womanly companionship tried her greatly, especially as Tom spent all his waking hours out-of-doors, and slept away all the time he spent in the house.

But one day, about three months after her arrival, she witnessed a terrible scene between him and his native servant, whom he had suddenly attacked, kicking and beating him, and when Marion, seeing the outrage from her bedroom, had rushed downstairs to plead for the offender to

be forgiven, she perceived, by the thickness of his utterance and his incoherent speech, that her brother was drunk. This was the first of many such scenes, but it was only after several repetitions of violent and brutal conduct on his part, that she realised with a sense of horror and disgust that Tom was a confirmed drunkard. The saving clause in the perplexity and trouble which this knowledge caused her, was the comfort and kindness she received from his partner, Dick O'Brien, a big broad-shouldered Irishman, standing six feet three in his socks, and a thoroughly good fellow in every sense of the word. His companionship had been Marion's only solace in the months which ensued after the first painful surprise of her discovery.

Tom Scrivener, having once resumed those evil habits which he had made an effort to break through when his sister first arrived, now gave way continually to the terrible vice, and had lately sunk to the deepest depths of incapability and degradation. Poor Marion's endeavours to influence him seemed useless, as remonstrance only goaded him to fresh outbreaks of intemperance, and lately she had given up attempting any pretence of concealment from Dick O'Brien, for she knew he was only too well aware of how hopeless the case was, and that interference on her part was of no avail.

A few minutes before she had sunk listlessly on to the steps in front of her bungalow, she had been talking the matter over with this man, who urged

her to consent to leave her brother, and take up a temporary residence with some friends of his in the nearest English territory, where she would be sure of a warm welcome, and which would be a more suitable home for her than her present one.

“The time has come when I must speak plainly to you,” he had said. “You are not safe here, and your brother is no better than a madman. I can’t tell you how sorry I am about it, and if I’d known you were coming here I would have stopped you, for I knew before you came that this was no place for you. You never ought to have come. I have tried my best to break him of it, and many a time he has promised amendment—but ’twas always a hopeless business. He could never keep off the drink for more than a week or two at a time. I have done the work of two men ever since I joined him, and we’ve done well in spite of it—but it can’t go on. I am beginning to feel I can’t last much longer without a change, and how could I go away and leave you here? Why, I wouldn’t dare to do it.”

“What can I do? I could not go away and leave him to his fate, knowing he’ll just drink himself to death.”

“Better that he should kill himself than that he should kill you, as he might do any day in one of his worst fits. Listen to me, and do as I wish you. There is a launch coming here to-morrow to take me over to get pay for the coolies, and

stores and things. Now, you get ready and come with me. The Weylands are old friends of mine, and I'll tell them you've got a bit seedy, and want looking after for a while, and they'll be delighted to have you, I know. Then when I get back again I'll come to this bungalow and take charge of Tom, and see what I can do for him ; and if he mends his ways, you might come over again. We could see about that by-and-by, for if he doesn't alter, I must make some change. I want to take a run home shortly, and I can't leave the estate in his hands during my absence ; it would go to rack and ruin. I must put a manager in my place, for I can't afford to lose everything, as I certainly should if I went away and left the estate with only Tom to look after it."

So, after some further persuasion, Marion had consented to be ready to cross over with him in the launch on the following day, on the understanding that it was only a temporary measure, and that her final decision as to leaving her brother for good should be made later on. Then she had said good-night sadly to her friend, and, as she watched his retreating figure, and thought over his parting words, she felt a sudden pang such as she had never yet experienced.

It seemed to her that he had held her hand as he said farewell a little longer than was his usual custom, that his eyes had looked into hers with an expression she had not noticed before, and that there was a protecting tenderness in his voice and manner, which she felt meant more to her than his

few words of counsel and persuasion would otherwise have seemed to convey. But above the rest, that one sentence, "I want to take a run home shortly," remained impressed on her memory and rang in her ears.

He would go away ; and now she must leave him, though she knew how much his companionship had been to her in these past months, when they had spent so many hours together in intimate communion, sitting chatting in her verandah, or rambling about the jungle paths, discussing subjects great and small, and growing daily more dependent on each other's society. What a blank her life would be without him ! She knew every tone of his voice, his every trick of manner and of speech, those little things which, when a woman loves, live for ever in her recollection. How could she bear to lose him ?

Suddenly she realised how much his presence and his sympathy had been to her, and how desolate she would be when he went out of her life. And yet she could not keep him. He probably had other claims on him—a mother, sisters, or, perhaps, some woman whom he loved ; and as this thought crossed her mind, the colour rushed to her face, and she leant forward as though instinctively to hide the betrayal of that secret which till then had been hidden in the deepest recesses of her heart, bending her head down till it almost touched her knees. "I love him, I love him ! How can I bear to part with him. What shall I do ?"

The sun had sunk and disappeared behind the hills, and with it, in that equatorial land where twilight is unknown, the daylight vanished rapidly over earth and sea, and darkness settled everywhere. But still she sat there. From the coolie lines below her came the sound of voices, a dog barking, the drone of a native lullaby, the cattle lowing in their sheds. Later these died away, and only the jungle insect noises broke the silence of the night.

Suddenly the crash of breaking glass in an inner room made her start quickly to her feet. It was her brother waking from a drunken slumber, who had swept an empty bottle from the table to the floor as he called loudly to his boy to bring another and to light the lamp. He staggered out on to the verandah as Marion ran across it, and fled upstairs to her own room. He glared after her with wild and bloodshot eyes as she disappeared, an evil look upon his face.

“Ha! She’s running away from me again. She doesn’t run from her Irish chum. She’ll spend hours and hours with him. And, confound it, she’s my sister, not his. What does he want with her I’d like to know?” Then he gave a diabolical laugh.

“He’s welcome to her, I’m tired of her, always preaching and fault-finding. I’m tired of her, I say; don’t want her, won’t have her.”

He reached a trembling hand towards the whisky bottle, and pouring some out, hastily tossed it off, and sitting down, remained for some

minutes staring fixedly at the floor. Then slowly pushing his chair backwards, he began muttering and pointing at the corner of the room, as though retreating from some horror he could see there.

“Snakes ! lots of them,” he said ; “I’ve seen them before. She sets them on to frighten me. I know their devilish tricks, and they’re always crawling round her, for she’s one of them.”

Still staring, he crept slowly towards the verandah, and called out loudly :

“Kill them, kill them, the brutes,” then suddenly his voice dropped to a sort of hissing whisper, as he muttered : “No, no, not them. Kill her, kill her.”

The night seemed unusually close and stifling, there was not a breath of air, the stillness of the atmosphere foretold a storm was brewing, it was the prelude to a hurricane of wind and rain which comes with little warning in the tropics.

Marion had undressed and was lying in her room. She made a pretty picture as she lay there, the light from the shaded lamp beside her falling with soft radiance on her white arms, which were clasped above her head. As though she found the heat oppressive, she had unfastened her nightdress, and her dark hair trailed about her, making a lovely contrast to the fairness of her skin. Beside her was a book which she had taken to distract her mind from anxious thought, but now it lay unopened by her side.

For the moment she had forgotten the proximity of the man she feared, forgotten that danger might

be close to her, whilst she pondered sorrowfully over the parting words of the man she loved. Not till now, when she contemplated the possibility of leaving him, had she realised the absorbing power of her love, the passionate yearning to be with him, the aching of her heart as it cried out against the banishment which seemed likely to be her fate.

Suddenly a curious grating sound struck her ear, which at first she hardly noticed ; but later, attracted by the persistence of the sound, and its peculiar nature, she rose languidly, and throwing a muslin wrapper over her, and taking the lamp in her hand, she pushed aside the curtain which hung across the door, and stepped out on to the verandah.

There she saw a sight which set her limbs all trembling and froze her blood with terror. Her brother sat in the centre of the room, his eyes were wild and wandering, and he muttered between his teeth. His right arm moved slowly backwards and forwards over the marble table close to him, he held something in his hand which glanced and shone as the light caught it, and, for a second, Marion wondered what it was. But that second revealed to her the nature of his occupation. The thing he held was a parang, or native pruning knife, a deadly weapon which he passed to and fro upon the table with the idea of sharpening it against the edge. He looked up as she entered, and caught sight of her just as she was turning, hoping to retreat.

“Come here,” he growled, “come here, you sly

“devil! Come close to me, and let me speak to you.”

She hesitated for one moment, looking hastily round to see what chance there was of flight, but she was encumbered by the lamp she held, and he was between her and the stairs. So she advanced towards him, her eyes fixed upon the gleaming weapon in his hand.

“Look here,” he said, rising, and trying to seize her dress, “I’m tired of seeing your ugly face about, and I’m going to cut your throat.”

With one wild cry for help she dropped the lamp, and as it fell, fortunately the flame was extinguished. He had raised his arm to strike her, but the falling lamp distracted his attention for a moment, and in that time she ran towards the stairs and cleared them with a leap, then down the narrow path she fled, away into the darkness; he following her, his footsteps close upon her own, his imprecations sounding in her ears. On, on she ran, her bare feet cut and bleeding from the roughness of the road, her limbs threatening each moment to give way, her breath coming with great panting sobs, and ever following her the echo of that heavy tread, the shadow of that murderous knife, the shouts and cries of her pursuer. Heaven! how far it was; how long the way. Would her strength hold out? Would she never reach there?

“Mr. O’Brien.”

Had he really heard his name, or was he dreaming. He sat up and listened. A storm was

coming, there was a sound of wind among the trees, and the first large drops of rain were pattering on the leaves, and on the attap roofing of the bungalow.

“ Mr. O’Brien, for God’s sake let me in ! Oh, mercy, will he never wake ? ”

This time there was no mistake, and in a moment he was out of bed and looking over the verandah. He saw her white-robed figure standing there. At the same instant she caught sight of him above.

“ He is coming after me ! He has a knife ; he means to kill me ! ” and she clasped her hands imploringly, as if entreating for the shelter he could give.

“ Perhaps the lower door is open. Come in that way. I will be down in a second, and fasten it securely after you.”

She groped her way along the wall until the open door yielded slowly to the pressure of her fingers, and she stepped inside. Standing on tip-toe and reaching high above her head, she found the bolt, and with one last desperate effort, pushed it home, then turning, his protecting arms were there outstretched to catch her, as, with a long shuddering sigh, she fell down senseless at his feet. Dick paused, listening as he stooped to lift his unconscious burden to carry her upstairs.

Outside the wind swept noisily round the house, the distant thunder reverberating from hill to hill, and the rain, falling now in torrents, hissing and splashing from the roof, made it difficult to distinguish any sound ; yet, through the disturbance of

the elements could be heard the voice of the infuriated madman, who beat upon the door and strove to gain an entrance to the house.

Dick stood gazing at her limp and nerveless form. He chafed her ice-cold hands in his, and threw a blanket hanging near across her feet. He was perplexed and anxious, and, man-like, craved for woman's aid in his dilemma, praying that she might only stir or speak.

At last a shiver passed over her. She moved and tried to rise.

"Where am I? How is this?" Then looking wildly round with wide eyes full of terror, she clutched him convulsively and clung to him, and seemed as though about to swoon again.

"Don't leave me. Stay by me. Ah, save me, save me!" and she wrung her hands, trembling violently.

"I will not leave you. Don't be frightened, dear, you are quite safe here."

He seated himself beside her, and talking gently to her, tried to reassure and quiet her. Gradually the storm passed over, the fury of the wind died away, and a cool breeze blowing softly, wafted sweet odours on the air. Eventually, from sheer exhaustion, Marion fell asleep, and then Dick left her, thankful that he had already made arrangements for conveying her to safer quarters next day. Before turning in, he sent a message to the coolie lines, telling the head man to send his wife up to the bungalow to wait on the lady at once, and to go himself to Tom Scrivener's house, and bring

away the things she would require, at the same time reporting on the condition of the master there.

When daylight broke, Dick sat in his verandah, thoughtfully smoking his pipe, and mounting guard over his premises, for so long as there was a chance of Tom appearing he dared not leave Marion unprotected.

“The Mem is awake and asks for Master,” said a tall, fine-looking Kling woman, as she made a deep salaam, and stood aside to let him pass.

Marion was reclining in a long chair in his room, where he had laid her down the previous night, but she rose quickly as he came towards her, and held out both her hands to him. He took them in his own, and still holding them, said gently :

“Are you rested now? I hope that you are better. Poor little woman, it was a dreadful time for you.”

Marion was naturally of a reserved disposition, and, having hitherto been little used to speaking of herself, she had found it easy to disguise her feelings. But what she had gone through had utterly unnerved her, and, although she had braced herself to meet him quietly, his grave and almost endearing manner was too much for her, and her self-control gave way. She tried to draw away her hands, and to say something to him in response, but the words would not come, and in another minute she had broken down completely, and he felt two large tears splash on to his hands.

“What, crying! My darling, for Heaven’s

sake, don't cry ! I can't stand that ! I did not mean to speak just yet. I thought it would be fairer to you to wait a bit, till you were in more comfortable quarters and better able to judge whether you could care for me or not. But I love you, dear, and although I am only a planter, and can't give you the sort of home you've been used to in the old country, still I'd do my best to make you happy, if you'll have me. You *must* know I've worshipped you ever since you set foot on the plantation, but I did not dare tell you, nor hint at it, lest I might scare you away. But now, because of Tom, I thought you *ought* to go. But give me the right to protect you and look after you, and you will be as safe on this estate as though you were living in the finest capital in Europe. Say, how shall it be, my queen ?”

She drew one hand away, then raised her arm and passed it round his neck and laid her head against his shoulder.

Then he bent, and drawing her closely to him, he kissed her passionately several times.

“How I've longed for this, my darling ; but I never dreamt you'd care for a rough fellow like me.”

Before the sun got up they started to walk together to her house, so that she might prepare for her departure that afternoon, whilst he remained to watch over her, lest her brother should still be in a dangerous condition. In the contemplation of their newly-found happiness, they little dreamt of the tragedy which awaited them at the end of their

walk. As they neared the bungalow he stopped, and after looking round cautiously, he said :

“ Follow me. Let me go first, and see if Tom is anywhere about,” and he began to ascend the steps. Suddenly he stopped, and turned so quickly that she, being close behind him, nearly fell to the ground.

“ Stop,” he cried. “ Go back. Don’t look this way, there is something you must not see.”

She gazed at him inquiringly, but he seized her arm, and pulled her after him some yards along the path over which they had just come. For, as his head had reached the level of the verandah, a terrible sight had met his eyes—Tom Scrivener stretched out lifeless on the floor, a great gaping wound across his throat, and the parang with which he would have taken his sister’s life, and with which he had destroyed himself, still grasped in his right hand. Dick hurried Marion away, thankful that he had prevented her entering the house, and it was not till she had been some days with those friends of whom he had spoken to her, that he told her of her brother’s death, and then he carefully concealed the manner of it.

Shortly afterwards they were married quietly, and Dick O’Brien took his bride away to England, where the loving devotion of her husband, and change of scene and occupation, did much towards obliterating the recollection of the tragedy, which had brought about the sudden termination of her courtship.

NAN

CHAPTER I.

A GRAND function was just over at the Government House of one of our Eastern Colonial towns ; the strains of a last waltz came floating on the air from the brilliantly-lighted ball-room, and through the wide verandah, out to the large pillared portico, where departing guests were rapidly being driven away.

Above the marble steps were two women, both noticeable in their own way, who stood awaiting their turn to leave, and chatting with their partners before they said good-night. The first was evidently married ; she had drawn off her gloves, and on the third finger of her left hand shone the token of her bondage. She was tall and fair ; a thoughtful and good face, with straight Greek features, and a quantity of wavy hair twisted in thick coils round her head. The other was of a medium height, slight and graceful, with red-brown hair that had a dash of gold in it ; and dark eyes, which, flashing, showed a daring spirit ; a nose slightly *retroussé*, and a pretty mouth. She was talking in low tones to the man who stood beside her, a man tall and broad-shouldered, whose well-built frame bespoke his power and strength.

He bent down over her, no doubt to whisper some soft nothing in her ear, as smilingly she said her last good-night and turned to go.

“ Oh, it has been a lovely ball ! I did enjoy it so ! ” she exclaimed, as she leaned back in the carriage on the way home.

“ Did you, dear ? I am glad of that. I did not see you dancing much, but perhaps you found it pleasanter outside.”

“ It was so hot, and I was rather tired. I was sitting in the garden a long while talking to Miles Cardew.”

“ Nan, don't be cross with me if I say something which perhaps you may not like. *Why*, Miles Cardew ? Can't you find some other man to flirt with, who would be just as interesting and amusing, and without the risk of difficulties or trouble afterwards.”

“ Difficulties ! What trouble could there be ? Besides, I'm not flirting with him. He is good-looking and amusing, and we get on well together, that is all.”

“ Yes, I've heard you say that sort of thing before. You like to play with fire, and so far you have only burnt your fingers once, but you don't mind how often you make others burn theirs. You say you're not flirting ; probably that's true. With him it's different—there's something more than flirting. One can see with half an eye the man's in love with you, desperately in love. Take care, Nan ; some day you will be sorry.”

“ For goodness' sake, Florence, don't be so

ridiculously in earnest, dear. What if he were a little bit in love? It would do him good, wake him up a bit. From what I hear, his life must be a deadly dull one."

"Yes, very dull. Do you think that it will make it any better for him to plunge into a *grand amour* with you?"

"I shan't see enough of him for that. He only comes in now and then, and he goes back to his estate to-morrow. He asked me to go with him, by the way, and stay a few days with his wife. If I knew her, perhaps I would; but I'm not sure that I care to risk incarceration on an island miles away from civilized society, in the companionship of a woman I have never seen. Do you know his wife?"

"She's nice enough, but she's often ill, and always very sad. She's not a happy woman. He married her years ago, and I fancy she's much older than himself. He came out from home quite young, and went to Australia to learn farming, and it was there he picked her up; she's not socially his equal, but she is passable. They came here with two children and no means, and Frank got him the management of this estate. He comes in now and then on business connected with it, as you know, but otherwise his existence must be dreary, as I fancy his wife is no real help or comfort to him, and the children are in England now."

"Flo, don't you think it's possible for a man and woman to be great friends without the certainty of it developing into any deeper feeling later on?"

Platonic friendship, that's the name they give it, is it not? Well, I should like to have him for a friend, he looks as if he could be very staunch and true. Don't you think that it is possible?"

"Only when either the man or the woman cares very much for someone else."

"Ah, then in our case it can be done."

"I'm sorry for him, and that's why I say don't risk making matters worse for him by letting him get fond of you. It's sport for you, but it might be death for him, and he's too good a fellow to be played with, as I've seen you play with men. You're not angry, Nan? I thought I might say this without fear that you would take it amiss."

The two had been close friends for many years, at school and afterwards, till Florence married Frank Henderson, an official in the Civil Service, and went abroad. For three years they had not met, then Florence sent a pressing invitation to her friend to come and visit her; she would see something of what life in the tropics was, and escape the fogs and cold of the winter months at home. Tempted by the pleasant picture, Nan Presgrave had induced her parents to consent to a parting with her, and had come out to spend a few months in the East.

She was no longer in her *première jeunesse*. She was now about five and twenty, with as much experience as most women of her age in the matter of flirtation, in which she was a past mistress. On her first arrival she had received the usual amount of admiration and attention which is bestowed on a

pretty girl under like circumstances in a foreign station. Amongst the foremost of her admirers was a certain Captain Godfrey, who appeared to find especial favour in her eyes ; and one day Nan confided to her friend that she had never met a man she liked so well, which, for her, was saying a good deal. But suddenly his admiration seemed to cool ; and one evening, when sitting out a dance with him, he thought it necessary to hint to her that he was not a marrying man, a sister was dependent on him, he had debts, etc., sufficient to touch her pride and stir her indignation. Was it possible, she thought, that she could have so shown her preference as to court excuses ? Anxious to pique the man, she metaphorically turned her back on him, and lavished all her fascination on her latest victim, Miles Cardew, reckless of the censorious remarks her intimacy with him might cause, or the possible destruction of his peace of mind.

“Of course, I am not angry, dear, but neither must you be so, if I don't appear to follow your advice. The fact is—and don't think this is any reflection on your kindness and hospitality, because you're both as nice to me as possible, and I could not be in better quarters—I want to get away for a little time. You know *why*, Flo ; I want to be quiet and meditate a bit. I shall come back all the better for the change.”

“I wish you would not do it. I am sure it would be a great mistake. But if you will, you will, and there's an end on't.”

“You know my restless nature. I want distraction. Don’t oppose me, there’s a dear. But here we are at home. I’ll sleep on it, and tell you in the morning what I mean to do.”

“Give it up, Nan. Find some other way. Let this man go, there are plenty of others who would answer your purpose quite as well.”

“Upon my word, you’re so anxious, Flo, that, if I didn’t know you worship Frank, I should imagine some personal interest was involved in all this pleading for him. I am a wilful woman and you must forgive me. Good-night,” and she disappeared into her own room.

She dismissed the native ayah who had awaited her return to assist in her disrobing, and, going on to the small verandah which overlooked the garden, she stood there gazing out over the moonlit scene.

An only child of fairly well-off parents, she had grown up with no whim ungratified. She had laughed and danced through life, enjoying everything, without a thought for others. No trouble had ever crossed her path till now, and this one seemed to be too great to bear.

“‘To be, or not to be.’ That is the question. To be, I think. I must go away, I shall betray myself if I stay here. I love Leonard Godfrey, alas! but I must never let them know. Each time we meet, I fear that I may show it. I could not bear to wear my heart upon my sleeve. Oh, would to God that I had never seen his face! To-night was one long torture to me, to be near to him continually, and yet to have to hold aloof. This other man—yes,

no doubt that Flo is right. He cares for me, but not too much. I will not let him care too much. I like him, he shall be my friend and help me in this great emergency. What happens to one when one broods and broods on the same unhappy subject, morning, noon and night, and dreams of it when sleeping? It strikes me 'that way madness lies.' Sometimes I think I cannot bear it, and that I shall go mad. I will not meet him any more till I have fought the battle with myself and conquered this wretched weakness. What has come to me? I never felt like this before. God help me, for I love him—yes, with all my heart!"

She leaned her head against a pillar where she stood, and her pretty face looked white and wan, as the tears gathered in her eyes, and, unheeded by her, dropped upon her dress. Some while she remained there, until the night-breezes, blowing softly, seemed to strike coldly on her uncovered neck and arms, and woke her from her reverie. She shivered slightly, and turning, slowly stepped into her room.

CHAPTER II.

A FORTNIGHT had passed since Nan had left her temporary home, and retired to the quietude and freedom of Miles Cardew's estate, hoping there to find distraction from her troublous thoughts. His wife had welcomed her with a certain degree of cordiality, and though her mental state was one of doubt and discontent, and she was inclined to

distrust Nan's friendliness and to feel some jealousy, as all neglected wives will do, yet she was really pleased to share Nan's bright companionship, and to find in it a break in the solitude and dullness of her life.

Nan had gone there for one week, but had already stayed two, each day postponing her departure on the persuasion of her host, and, herself reluctant to face the pain of meeting again continually the man she loved, and beginning once more the battle with her feelings and her pride.

She had spent some happy hours, wandering about the estate with Miles, interested in the details of his work ; and, when that was done, rambling many miles through jungle paths with him, or sitting by the shore discussing subjects of all kinds, while they listened to the murmur of the sad sea waves. Friendship ripens rapidly under circumstances of such close association, and she had grown to know and like him very much. As for Miles, he simply worshipped her with an absolute and absorbing passion ; from the first moment they had met, he knew she was the one woman in the world for him, and these days spent entirely in her society had increased his growing admiration, until it developed into love, and gained complete possession of him, mastering every other consideration, and every scruple, every question of right or wrong. He loved her, but he dared not speak. He had told her much of the history of his past life, and cursed the fate that bound him.

Further than this he dared not go. He had made that fatal mistake which many others do, and deeply had he rued it ; but never before as now. If he were free—but why think of that ? She had come into his life as a bright star shining to illumine for a brief space its gloom and hopelessness. He would keep her whilst he could, and when she left him—well, he would not yet consider that.

The working day was over, and the sun was slowly sinking behind some golden clouds, casting a red glow across the green leaves of the jungle which extended as far as the eye could reach along the hills, and throwing broad shadows from them upon the lower ground beneath. The coolies were returning from their labour, and their voices broke the stillness of the air as they called to one another on their homeward way along the slopes between the rows of coffee trees laden with their crimson berries. Nan had found a cosy corner for herself in a field of lalang grass quite near the bungalow. She was lying full length upon the ground, heedless of snakes, or centipedes, and other noisome creatures of the soil ; a book she had been reading was tossed aside, and her arms made a pillow for her shapely little head ; her eyes fixed on the vault of heaven, between which and them nought intervened save one tall tree that shot up straight and leafless until it seemed to pierce the sky. She was lost in thought and in perplexity. The next day Miles was going to the mainland to transact some business. Should

she return with him, as Florence Henderson had sent a note begging her to do? or should she listen to the prompting of her selfish inclination, and, regardless of what she knew she ought to do, stay on a little longer? Latterly, she had been somewhat uneasy now and then ; Miles had never said one word that even the most straight-laced could have carped at, and yet, more than once, she had caught an expression on his face, and a look in his eyes, which had made her feel afraid. Other men ere this had told her of their love, and she had not found it difficult to put their suit aside and free herself from any trouble afterwards. But there was a sense of force and power about this man which frightened her, she felt she must not let things go to far. Her meditations were abruptly terminated by the appearance of his stalwart form between her and the sky, and she sat up hastily, saying :—

“ How you startled me ! ”

“ Did you not hear me coming through the grass? You must have been asleep, or *very* deep in thought.”

“ So I was. A struggle between inclination and duty, which is always a mental effort of a most engrossing kind.”

“ May I know the why and wherefore? I should have supposed you could have no duty here, save your inclination. That is how it ought to be,” and he seated himself beside her on the ground.

“ Ah, but that is how it isn't ! You see the fact is I am very happy here, and have had a

thoroughly good time. You ask me to stay longer, and I really want to stay, but the Hendersons have been so kind to me, and I would not wish them to think me at all ungrateful. I am afraid I must regretfully tear myself away."

"Don't say that. They won't miss you for another week or so. I will see Mrs. Henderson and explain about it, and I'm sure she'll understand. It does my wife good to have you here, we cannot spare you yet."

She thought for a moment, looking straight before her. The pain in his voice was unmistakable, and she knew it meant he could not bear to think of losing her. There was a pause and then she spoke again, slowly, and in a low voice.

"I don't want to, but I think I ought to go."

He leaned over, and took her hand in his.

"Nan—may I call you Nan? You know my history, the story of my life. It has not been a bed of roses for the last few years of it, and the only happy days I've had since boyhood have been these days I've spent with you. In a short while you must leave us and return to your friends, your round of pleasure and amusement. A week more or less of it to you makes little difference, but to me—well, to me that week would be a gift most infinitely precious. Spare me that short time out of the waste of long, long days that I shall have to live without you."

She raised her eyes to answer him, and met the glance which always frightened her.

"If you put it in that way, of course I will

remain. But don't look so depressed. We have agreed to be fast friends, and we shall often meet. And, of course, you may call me Nan. I like it from my special friends. And now, sir, may I have my hand?"

He pressed it gently as he let it fall.

"When do you leave? I must write to Florence. She will say I am a fraud," she added, as she rose to go.

"To-night at eight o'clock. I should have left last night, but I always try to make the time of my coming and going rather uncertain, especially when I have money to bring back.

"What money? What difference does that make?"

"The wages for the coolies, a very large sum. You've heard of gang robberies in these parts, haven't you? These low-class Chinese coolies are often a desperate bad lot, and we have a number of them just now at work on the estate. If they knew a sufficient sum was likely to be in the bungalow to make it worth their while, it would be quite possible for them to send a message to their friends, and bring over a gang of ruffians to rob the house. Being an island, it would be so easy for them afterwards to get away with their loot. So I don't intend to give them a chance if I can help it, and never let them know beforehand when I'm going to bring the pay. I said that I was going yesterday, but I shall go to-night instead."

"And when shall you come back?"

"To-morrow afternoon. I must return in time

to pay out all the cash before it's dark. You won't be nervous. The Indian servants are trustworthy, and my wife has often been here all alone. There is really no danger."

"Not exactly nervous, but I shall be glad to see you back. Now I must go and write my letter," and nodding to him, she turned towards the bungalow.

Later on they stood together on the sea shore in the darkness, where a boat with native oarsmen lay waiting to convey him to the mainland.

"Good-night. Sleep well. *Au revoir*," he said.

And the following was the note she handed him to take to Florence Henderson :—

"Dearest Flo,—Don't scold me if I play the truant for a short time longer. I did intend to have returned to you to-day, but instead I send this missive to tell you that I cannot tear myself away. This place is so charming, I must make the most of it, as probably I shall not come again.

"Coffee, coffee, everywhere, and not a drop to drink, which is literally true, as they send it all to market, and don't save even a few berries for poor me.

"It is a dear little bungalow, right on the top of a high hill, and all round it, as far as you can see, the coffee trees ; their large green leaves make a delicious rest for tired eyes, and the starry white blossoms, which I think so pretty, send a delightful fragrance on the air. I eat and sleep,

She entered the bungalow and found her hostess had retired, so spoke a few words to her through the partition which separated the two rooms, and then prepared to go to rest. A little while she lay listening to the usual sounds, which, when she first came there, had kept her wakeful. The rustle of the wind through the palm trees, and the creaking of the chicks as they swung to and fro in the verandah, some dogs fighting below near a Chinaman's hut, and the mewling of a pussy-cat calling to its friends ; whilst, occasionally, a rat scuttled across the attap roofing above her head, or a bat flew blindly through the room. She was accustomed to these noises now, and would have missed them had they ceased, and ere long they soothed her into slumber and she fell asleep.

In the middle of the night she was awakened suddenly by the sound of feet running outside her bedroom door, and at that moment a wild piercing shriek fell on her ear. Half conscious, she started up, wondering what cry of dire distress had wakened her? She was not long in doubt ; footsteps of several persons passed her door, and voices in a foreign tongue called loudly to each other in the passage. Like a flash came the recollection of Miles's words that afternoon.

“ Heaven help us ! 'Tis a robbery, and we are all alone.”

Trembling with fear, she opened her curtain, and stealthily, crept across to where a faint light showed through the partition door into the other room, wherein her hostess lay. She listened, but there

was no movement, and she dared not open her door, and hardly dared to speak, lest by so doing she should attract the notice of some ruffian close at hand. Perhaps they thought her room was empty, as the Cardews so seldom had a guest.

“Mrs. Cardew! What has happened? Can I come to you?”

No answer. Very quietly she drew a chair towards her, and climbing on to it, peeped over the partition wall into the room beyond. An oil wick was burning in a tumbler of water on the table, and shed a sickly glimmer through the room and by this dim light she saw a sight which filled her soul with terror. The chairs and furniture were overturned, and everything was scattered in complete confusion; the contents of the clothes-press were strewn about, and some empty jewelry cases thrown aside. And on the floor beside the bed she saw a poor, limp, white-robed form flung roughly down, a red stream flowing from her heart leaving a dark spot whereon she lay, and marking on those silent boards the ghastly sign of murder; the eyes, wide open, stared with that grim fixity which tells the tale of death. Nan held her breath, and gazed as though she could not take her eyes from off the terrible sight. Before her mind could grasp the hideous meaning of what lay before her, a sound attracted her attention, and she turned and quickly stepped down from the chair.

A man was coming straight towards her from the doorway, uplifted in his hands he held an axe, and with a savage yell he rushed at her. She

tried to fly—too late ! one crushing blow, a sound of thunder sounded in her ears, and flashes of bright light before her eyes, she staggered blindly a few steps, then fell down senseless, and mercifully knew no more.

* * * * *

Some months have passed since Miles said good-night to Nan by the sea, before the terrible tragedy that gave him his freedom, but nearly deprived her of her life. Thanks to Florence's tender care and nursing, she has at last recovered her strength, and in a few days she is going home to the old country, and will say good-bye to the East. In the cool shaded drawing-room of the Henderson's bungalow she sits waiting for Miles, to whom she has sent a simple line :—

“ I am going home. Come and see me.—NAN.”

His face was grave as he entered the room. She thought he looked sad and troubled, and she held out both her hands to him as a silent token of her sympathy. He took them in his own, and raised one to his lips.

“ I am glad to see you,” she said, as a warm blush overspread her cheeks.

“ It seems so long since we parted, that night by the sea. Do you remember ? ”

“ Six long months. Little we dreamt what was before us then. Don't talk of it.”

“ Dear woman, I thought that I had lost you ! ”

He drew a chair quite near to her, and for a moment neither spoke, as he sat down and once more took her hand in his.

“Nan, may I tell you that I love you?”

“Listen Miles, there is something that I must say to you. You know I have a reputation of being heartless and a flirt. Perhaps you have seen enough of me by this time to judge if I am that. But a shadow seems to come between us. Shall I tell you what it is?”

“Not if it is anything that keeps you from me, dear.”

“I like you better than any other man, but I do not think I love you. I have cared *once*, very much, for someone, and now I feel as though I could never love any other being as I cared for him. It is only fair that you should know this. I believe, in spite of it, that I could make you happy. Do you think, now that I have told you this, that you will take the risk?”

“Give yourself to me, darling. I’m not afraid, if you will trust your happiness to me.”

For answer, she turned her face towards him with a smile, and he drew her close to him, and kissed her on her lips.

ADRIFT

THE clear radiance of a tropical moon was shining above a big ship steaming eastward, on the deck of which, leaning against the bulwarks, stood two figures side by side, gazing out over the phosphorescent sea, with sad and troubled faces. They had been fellow-travellers all the way from England ; she was going to join her parents at a seaport on the China station, where her father was in command ; he was a mercantile clerk, about to enter an office in the Straits Settlements—well born, but penniless, and consequently no fitting mate for her. By the rule of contrary, of course they had fallen in love, and now were tasting the bitterness of a first parting, which was before them on the following day.

“ Don’t cry, my darling ; it breaks my heart to see you cry. Be true to me, and believe me I will love you till I die. The hope of winning you some day will be my help and comfort, and keep me always looking forward to a happier time. Cheer up, my dear one ; and by and by be sure that if you wait for me I will come to you. Beatrice, you will be true to me, I know.”

“ Ah, Percy, I cannot live without you now. To-morrow I must say good-bye to you, and

Heaven only knows when we shall meet again. It seems so hopeless. I am not brave like you. The future is so full of doubt, and of uncertainty. But I shall wait for you, and for ever, if it must be so. Be sure that I shall never care for any man but you."

And so they said their sad farewell, and on the following day he watched the steamer fade slowly from his sight, bearing away her solitary figure on the quickly vanishing stern, despondent and alone.

* * * * *

Two years later the same bright moon shone down upon a house that looked like fairyland, so gaily was it decorated with many-coloured lanterns, and from the inner rooms the strains of dance music were wafted on the air, whilst from without the shadows of moving forms were dimly seen revolving round and round. On the verandah were many groups, chatting and smoking, and playing cards ; and near the entrance stood the hostess, talking to a tall, fair man, who had just appealed to her for an introduction to one of her guests.

"Miss Heygate? Certainly. She is dancing now, but as soon as she stops, I will. She is very handsome, is she not? She is only staying here for a week or two with me. You know she is going to be married very soon."

"Indeed? To whom?"

"She is engaged to Sir Redgrave Dycott, a rich man, who was travelling for pleasure round the world. Ah, now that dance is over. Come. I'll introduce you before she disappears."

“Miss Heygate—Mr. Pearson. I see that you have met before,” as Beatrice seems to recognise her friend, and the vivid colouring flies into her cheeks.

“So long ago—two years I think. Perhaps Miss Heygate has forgotten me. May I have the pleasure of a dance?”

For answer she hands her programme to him, her eyes cast down and fan uplifted to cover her confusion as he scribbles some hieroglyphics on the card.

A few minutes afterwards they are threading their way along the narrow garden paths, her arm on his, her heart beating fast beneath the folds of creamy lace which cover with careless grace the richness of her dress. For a while they do not speak, his eyes are fixed upon her face with passionate yearning, mingled with regret.

“So in one month from this time you will be Lady Dycott. I congratulate you. Our love-dream was short-lived on your part. I suppose I ought to have expected something of the sort. But, foolishly, I thought you different from the rest.”

“Percy, your reproaches are unjust. Why did you not write to me? I sent you several letters, but never heard from you. They told me you had gone away from here, and so I thought that you had tired of your love for me, and found a new one in some other place.”

“I never had your letters. If what you say is true, we have been cruelly deceived. By whom? Your parents, I suppose. By Heaven, if that is

so——” He checked himself with an effort, his features growing stern and white in the moonlight.

“Oh ! this is terrible. How could they do it? What am I to do?” And, greatly agitated, she dropped his arm, and almost ran along the path in front of him, he following her footsteps, heedless where she led him, until they suddenly found themselves outside the garden, at some distance from the bungalow, standing upon the beach by the sea. The tiny silver ripples broke in soft murmuring rhythm at their feet, and moored quite near to them a little boat was lying, which seemed to convey a silent invitation, accepted by him at once. He entered it, and, holding out his hand to her, said “Come.”

“Oh, no ! I dare not. We should be missed. I really could not go.”

“I claim the right to have you, dear, to-night. We can’t talk here ; at any moment someone may come to look for you, and there is something I must say to you before we part. Let me row you over to the island there. It is not far, and we can stay a short while, and still be back before you will be missed. It’s such a glorious night, it will be pleasant on the water. Beatrice, for the sake of what is past you won’t refuse me ? Come with me darling,” he said pleadingly. And after a second’s hesitation she stepped into the boat. With rapid strokes he pulled away to where, in the distance, the rows of palm-trees made a dark line along the opposite shore. When they reached the landing-place, he helped her out ; then, tying up the boat,

he went before her along a narrow winding-path which led beneath the cocoanuts to a tempting little sandy cove, where he had been many times before. A palm had fallen down, and made a sort of rustic seat for them. She felt his arm steal round her waist, and then he caught her close to him, and kissed her on her lips.

“ You gave yourself to me, and you are mine. No one shall take you from me. Beatrice, dear one, speak to me. Do you love me, darling, still ? ”

“ I told you when we said good-bye that I would wait for you, and so I should have done. But I thought that you had given me up, and I did not care what happened then. My mother wished me to marry Sir Redgrave, and to please her I said yes. It did not seem to matter what became of me, if I could not marry you. But *now*, Percy, now that I have found you, and I know that you love me still—I can’t. But they will be so angry. I don’t know what to do.”

“ You shall marry me, my own. No one shall come between us now, for I will never part with you. Ah, dearest one, how good it is to have you near me ! My love, dear love, I thought that I had lost you. I will never risk the loss of you again.”

Some while they sat there, forgetful of the world, oblivious of partners, dancers, everything, the rapture of the moment eclipsing every other thought.

“ Oh, Percy, look ! what’s that ? ” And, drawing herself from his encircling arms, she pointed seawards. A wide expanse of water lay before

them, and some way out between the wavelets, irradiated by the silver moon, a boat was rocking to and fro.

“By Jove! our boat! How did it get away? I suppose the knot has slipped, and it has drifted out. No matter. Don’t alarm yourself, I’ll have it back in no time.” And he threw off his coat and waistcoat and strolled towards the sea.

“What are you going to do?”

“Swim out and fetch it back. It won’t take me long. You can stand here and be my beacon, darling.” And, laughing, he once more drew her close to him, then kissed her passionately several times. Another minute he was off.

She knew he was a powerful swimmer, and no thought of danger crossed her mind as she stood watching his head move slowly through the water, and musing on their conversation so abruptly terminated.

Suddenly she heard a cry; it seemed to her a call for help, or was it merely to announce to her that he had reached the boat? The next instant she saw his arms flung upwards, and he disappeared. She strained her eyes to see him rise again, perhaps he might be only diving under it. Some seconds passed; nothing to be seen, only the boat still drifting far away. Her heart beat painfully, she felt her breath come fast with apprehension, and called aloud involuntarily.

“Percy, come back! Why does he not answer me?” Still no sign nor sound; and then the certainty of what had happened dawned on her.

“ Ah, Heaven, I can't help him ! He is drowning ! Save him, save him ! ” And she wrung her hands, and cried out loudly, then started running wildly up and down the shore.

But, far away from any human ear, no help was near, no aid could come to her. With one long wail of anguish she stretched her arms towards the cruel sea ; then mercifully her senses left her, and she reeled and fell, and lay there white and still for hours afterwards, until they came and found her unconscious on the sand.

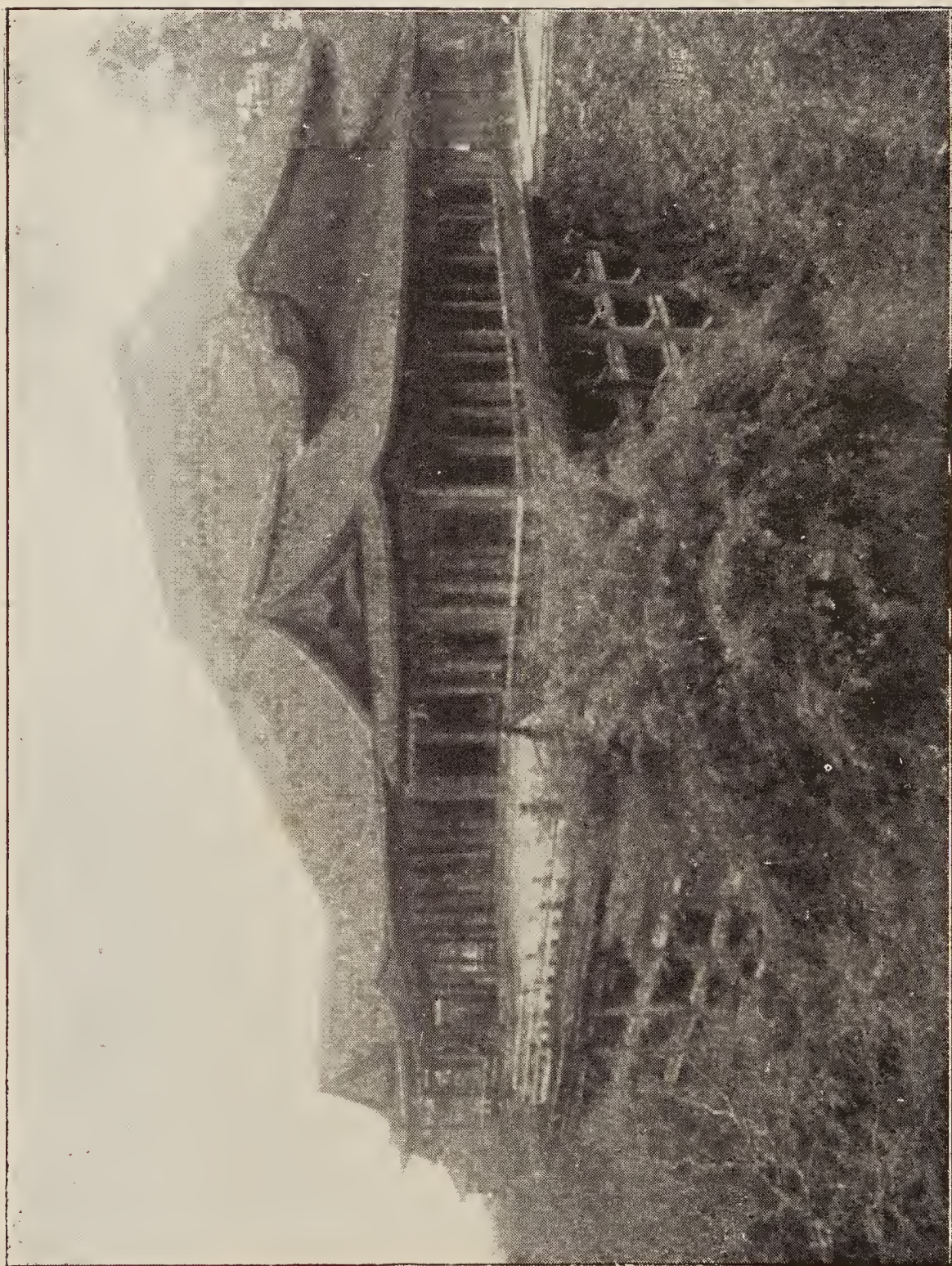
* * * * *

“ So you knew Percy Pearson. Such a good fellow, a favourite with us all. It was so sad that he was drowned.”

“ How did it happen ? ”

“ Nobody knows. A girl was staying here who had met him before he came abroad. He took her for a row one moonlight night, and it is supposed that the boat upset. How she was saved remains a mystery, for she was dreadfully ill for weeks afterwards, and could give no particulars of what occurred. They found her lying insensible on the shore of an island just outside the harbour ; but his body and the boat had disappeared, and no trace of them was ever seen. They say she will never quite recover the shock ; her memory of what happened just before her illness is a blank. You've seen her driving, have you not ? She is our latest bride.”

“ Lady Dycott, do you mean ? A lovely face, but such a sad one. Now I understand.”



THE TEMPLE OF KWANNON

PART III

THE FAR EAST

Part III.—THE FAR EAST

A LEAP FOR LOVE

ABOUT five miles from the town of Kyoto, in Japan, is a lovely piece of verdant scenery surrounded by mountains, whose lofty heights looked down upon a precipitous gorge, through which the rapids flow, rushing and tumbling over the river bed, their course broken here and there by rocks and islets which scatter the clear and sparkling water to right and left of them as it hurries on its way,

A small village lies under the shadow of the hills, and the quaint Japanese houses are dotted about, each adding its tiny but perceptible charm to the picture.

Beneath the roof of one of these doll's houses, with paper windows and sliding panels, dwelt a family of three : Takawara, the husband ; Komita, his pretty young wife ; and their round-faced, black-eyed baby. When Komita married, she had hardly

seen her husband, as is generally the case with the women of Japan. But Takawara had proved kind and affectionate, and she had learned to love him with a warmth of feeling somewhat unusual even amongst the sunny-hearted, laughter-loving people of her race. She was as fondly attached to him as was possible from the mode of her education and the manner of her bringing up, and for the first year of her married life she was thoroughly content and happy. But suddenly a cloud arose.

The buds were formed upon the cherry trees when her baby came, and although the infant promised to be healthy and strong enough, it was too young for her to take with her to the Feast of Cherry Blossoms, which was held earlier than usual that year. So Takawara went alone to Kyoto to enjoy the fun and frolic, and from that time Komita dated the beginning of her discontent. Her husband owned a small farm a short way up the mountain side, and there he used to go daily to work, returning to his home at sunset, where he spent his evenings chatting with Komita, or perhaps with some neighbour in the village, till it was time to go to rest. But of late, since the Feast of Cherry Blossoms, he had made frequent excursions to Kyoto, coming back at all hours of the night, and once or twice not till the following morning. Komita was afraid to ask him where he went, and what he did there, and a growing distrust and jealousy filled her heart.

One evening, Takawara came in from work, and after swallowing a hasty meal, set out towards

the city ; and with sad eyes Komita stood at the door of her cottage and watched him out of sight. With a sigh she closed her door, and having drawn together the screens which formed her sleeping-room, she threw herself on the matting, and drawing her infant close to her, she covered him gently with a *futon* (quilt) lying near, and prepared to go to sleep. She knew her husband would not return that night, and wanted the lonely hours to pass quickly, for she hoped she would forget her trouble while he slept. But she could not rest, and after tossing and turning for a long while, an idea dawned on her, which at last grew to a fixed resolve. She would go to the Temple of Kiyomizudera, on the side of the mountain, and petition the Goddess of Mercy, the great Kwannon, to aid her. She would not tell her husband, but would get her household duties finished and everything prepared, and as soon as he had breakfasted and had gone to his work, she would write her prayer, and carry it away to the Temple. There she would seek the shrine of Jizo, the god who was the helper of unhappy women, and surely he would listen to her and succour her in this emergency.

So when he came in she met him with a pleasant smile, although her heart was heavy ; and as soon as he had taken his tools and gone off to his work, she prepared to start on her expedition. She wrote her letter and slipped it carefully into the folds of her *obi* (bow or pocket), and was just about to fasten her baby on to her back, for she could not leave the little fellow, though she knew his weight would

add considerably to her fatigue in climbing the steep road at the top of which was the Temple she wished to reach. At that moment, a neighbour looked in with the usual greeting, "Ohayo" (good morning), to which she responded with a cheerful "Shibaraku" (what a long time since you have been here!), though her heart misgave her, for she knew this acquaintance was a talkative person.

"What brings you, Gozaimasu? I'm busy this morning, and have not much time to stop and talk."

"Shall I come back by and by? But I see you look sad lately, and your husband goes away and leaves you all alone. Is is not so, Komita?"

"Sad! How can I be sad when I have my baby? Look at the darling; doesn't he grow fast? And so strong and hearty, too. As for my husband, no doubt he has business in the city. That is his affair."

"True, Komita, but it's your affair, too. Would you like to know what his business in Kyoto is? For I could tell you."

Komita started. Was it possible that through this woman she might discover what she so much wished to know?

"How can that be? Who told you what my husband's business is?"

"Ha! Never mind who told me. *I* can tell *you*. He goes to see a pretty giesha (dancing girl), who danced for the first time at the Feast of Cherry Blossoms, and they say the men are all quite wild about her, she dances so amazingly. Takawara

shares her favours with her other admirers, and you may be sure, he has no business in Kyoto save this girl."

"Thank you for telling me. And, Gozaimasu, will you add to your kindness in this matter and keep it a secret? It is well that I should hear of it, but I would not like to think our neighbours knew."

"Little fool! It is no secret. Every one knows of his infatuation but yourself. I wonder it has not reached your ears already. But as you're busy, I won't stay longer now," and the chatterer departed.

Komita caught her baby to her breast and hugged it closely, while the tears rolled down her cheeks, and bitter exclamations broke from her.

"A pretty geisha! Am I not pretty, too? And baby? Have I not given him his son? How could he leave me! But, alas! I cannot dance. I can scrub, and cook, and sew, but no, I cannot dance."

Then she stopped crying, and wiped her eyes. And presently she sallied forth to carry out her purpose with a brave face, determined, if she could, to deceive any of the villagers she might meet.

It was a lovely day; the sky was cloudless, and delicious odours from the fragrant blossoms of flowering trees were wafted on the air, whilst many bright-hued butterflies chased each other across her path, and large bumble-bees hummed their soothing song beside her, as she mounted the steep roadway up the hill.

At last she reached the plateau where the shrine of the great goddess Kwannon was. Through the big gates she passed, and in front of the three-storied pagoda, across the large platform used for religious dances, and round the corner to the shrine she sought—that of Sessha, dedicated to Jizo, who was to receive the petition she had brought. Reverently she unfolded from its silken wrapper her prayer for help and comfort, and dropped it into the little slit for votive offerings, together with a silver coin, which was to be its surety of sincerity and hope. Then, weary with her long walk, she retraced her steps as far as the dancing platform in the larger temple, and, unstrapping her living bundle from her back, she lay down with her babe upon her arm to rest awhile before returning. She had slept an hour or two, when a touch awoke her, and she started up, and saw an aged woman standing by her side. The stranger said :

“ You are tired, and you look unhappy, little one. What ails you ? ”

Her manner was commanding, but there was something sympathetic in the tone of her voice, and, perceiving this, Komita answered :

“ I am unhappy, Okamisan (honourable lady), but nothing ails me, only I have come a long way, and I was tired and fell asleep.”

“ Tell me what your trouble is. May be, I can help you.”

Her manner was kind, and Komita longed to confide in some one.

“ Yes, I will tell you. I am married, this is my

baby, and I love my husband, and he has always been good to me till now. But a geisha in Kyoto has danced for him, and his heart is turned from me, and I can no longer find favour in his eyes. And so I am unhappy, and I have come to make an offering to the god Jizo, and have asked him to intercede for me, and to pray the great Kwannon to have mercy on me and give me back my husband and my happiness. Can you help me, Okamisan?"

"There is a way, but doubtless it would be too hard for you."

"Nothing could be too hard. Tell me, kind lady, what I can do."

The platform on which they stood was built out on piles over the ravine, and below it the rift descended for hundreds of feet, a sheer precipice whose surface was covered by some trees and shrubs.

The woman turned, and passing her arm through Komita's, drew her to the edge of the platform, and pointed downwards. Komita's head reeled as she gazed from the giddy height.

"Have you the courage, little one, to take a leap down there? The mighty Kwannon never fails those who face this peril, and, by a miracle, as they fall, will sweep away all trouble from their path. I know no one who has ventured on this remedy, but the truth has been proved in olden days."

Komita looked over the railing and shuddered as she contemplated the horror of the fall down to the bottom of the abyss, with death waiting for its victims at the end of it. Then she looked up.

“It would be well, perhaps, if one were brave enough, to see if the goddess would still succour those in need of help. But I must not linger here, the day is getting late, and I have far to go. I thank you for your kind consideration, lady,” and with a low obeisance, she turned towards the gateway and hurried along her homeward road.

And as she hastened on, her mind was fixed upon what the wise woman had told her. Could she risk all and fling herself down that ghastly yawning chasm? Perhaps her fate would be a cruel death, and she would leave her precious baby motherless. Why not take him with her? Ah no, she could not do that—her beautiful baby of whom she was so proud. If she did it, she must go alone. And should the great Kwannon awaken to the knowledge of her trouble and hear her prayer, what joy for her.

It was quite dark when she reached her cottage, and for some moments she groped about to find a light. Then she saw that Takawara had come in, and had gone out again. There were signs of his having been there lately: a bowl of rice, of which he had evidently partaken, and which he must have cooked himself for his evening meal, and his tools and working garments flung down in a corner. A sort of pang went through Komita as she thought it was the first time since he brought her from her parents' house to share his home with her that he had found her absent, and his food not ready for him on his return from work. He had gone and had not missed her, he had not fretted at

her absence, or waited to hear where she was, or whether any mishap might have happened to her. What did he care if she lived or died? He did not want her. He had gone to his geisha—and she would go to Kwannon.

She set about tidying the place and putting it in order. Then she fed her baby, and as she leant over him, the hot tears fell upon his up-turned face, and made him blink his large dark eyes. Gradually he closed them, and when she saw the lashes lying in two lines along his soft round cheeks, she put him quietly down, and rolled him up in folded *futons*, so that he would not wail for her, missing the warmth to which he was accustomed as she lay quite close to him. Then bending over him she pressed her face to his, and breathing a whispered “Sayonara” (good-bye) she crept to the door, lifted the latch and closed it gently, and with her fingers to her ears lest she should hear a cry to call her back again, she fled, running with all her speed.

* * * * *

In one of the many tea-houses situated on the outskirts of Kyoto sat Takawara. In the street outside, some persons were strolling homewards, and several *jinrickshas*, too, were waiting to take up passengers, while overhead a brilliant moon was shining, which lit up the footway. Inside, the sounds of laughter mingled with applause. A geisha, bedecked with flowers and bedizened with jewels which marked her as a special favourite, was moving through the slow figures of a national

dance. Takawara watched her graceful gestures with the liveliest interest, and joined in the shouts of approval which followed the termination of each figure in the dance. It was late, and soon the tea-house would close, and he would trudge the five miles of road to his home.

Suddenly there was a stir in the room, a sort of murmur passed through the audience from the entrance to where Takawara sat, and wondering what could be the meaning of it, he turned enquiringly, and saw a man advancing towards him whom he recognized as a fellow-villager, and who beckoned to him, and called him by his name.

“What is it? Do you want me, neighbour?”

“Ay, friend. Come outside. I have ill news for you.”

So he followed him to the door, and the man delivered his news.

“Komita has fallen down a precipice, and was taken up for dead. She calls for you, and you must hasten if you wish to see her still alive. They say that she is dying.”

As he heard these words, for the first time since the Feast of Cherry Blossoms Takawara's conscience pricked him, and he realized how much he had neglected his little wife.

He hurried on, at the same time trying to find out how the accident had happened. But the man could tell him nothing save the fact.

He entered his house with difficulty, owing to the number of peasants who had crowded in. Pushing them aside, at last he reached Komita,

who was lying on the floor, maimed and bleeding, and feebly moaning as though in pain. When she saw him, her face brightened, and she smiled.

“Ah, you have come to me; Kwannon has heard my prayer.”

Faith works wonders, for Komita did not die, though for a time she lay 'twixt life and death. She still lives to tell the story of her fall through space, and how the kind goddess intervened to save her, averring that the days of miracles are not yet done. It was a leap for love, and she regained her lost happiness as the reward of courage. For when Takawara heard what she had dared for the sake of retaining his affection, the charms of the geisha were as dross to him. So Komita had no more sad and lonely hours, and the old tradition of Kwannon's goodness, having demonstrated its infallibility, is still cherished as an incentive to hope and courage in the hearts of the women of Japan.

NOT WOODED, BUT WED

A SUNSHINY morning towards the end of September, one of those warm bright days which seem a prolongation of summer, before the chill of autumn has crept into the early hours, bringing a forewarning of winter to come.

Two girls stepped out of the French window of a prettily-furnished sitting-room, in a charming country residence in South Wales, and crossing a lawn marked out for tennis with the net stretched invitingly across it, they seated themselves on a rustic seat under a shady tree on the farther side. They were both about the same age, just budding into womanhood and leaving their teens behind them ; the one was pretty, tall and fair, with eyes of turquoise blue, and a singularly sweet expression ; the other was of medium height, with black hair and those dark brown piercing eyes which usually accompany it. They remained silent a few moments, then looking round the garden with a comprehensive glance, she said :

“ To think it is my last day here ! I am so sorry to go. It was awfully good of you to ask me, Jac, and I have had such a happy time.”

“ I shall miss you, and am just as sorry to lose

you, dear, as you are sorry to go. And I would ask you to stay longer, but father has promised to go and stay with the Halswells, and they are such old friends that I know he would not like me to put it off. He won't go anywhere without me, since mother died. But now you've found your way here, you'll come again, won't you? Let me know when, and I will soon settle it all right."

"Ah, Jacquetta, I shan't come again for long enough. It is one of my mother's fixed principles that a girl should be satisfied to remain always in her own home, doing the duties which lie to her hand, as she calls it. Oh, my dear, you can't tell how sick of it I am, and how deadly it is at Low-bridge. The same monotonous round of eat, drink and sleep, varied by an occasional call on some dreary people who are as uninteresting and stupid as we are ourselves, and church on Sundays. If I could only get away from it, go out into the world and work, do something, anything—live. But mother can't understand, and if I ever speak to her like this, she only says it is wicked to be discontented, and that there is plenty of parish work to do if I want occupation. But I hate that sort of thing, I can't visit poor people, I don't know what to say to them, and so I keep quiet and consume my soul in vain longings for the impossible. But the time here has been just like a pleasant dream; it is so different to that horrid town we live in, and you are so sweet and kind."

"It always seems so sad to me, Bernie, that you and your mother don't get on. I worshipped mine,

and when she died I thought I should never be happy again. But then I have father, and the boys—for although they are both away, they are always devoted to me, and such dear fellows that I can't feel lonely as long as I have got them somewhere knocking about the world. And that reminds me, I had a letter from Bruce this morning from Hong Kong, where he is stationed now, and he sends a message to you."

"To me? How can that be? Why he has never seen me!"

"No, dear, never. But he has heard a lot about you for all that. I was always writing about you, two years ago, when I was at school, and since then he declares my letters are full of Bernice Harrington and little else. So I sent him your photograph, as I thought he would understand better why I was so fond of you, if he saw what you are like. And this is what he says in answer to it. Let me see, where is it? Ah, here we are, 'I am glad you sent me the photo, after all I have heard of her, and now that I have seen her, I am sure she is a real good sort, just the girl to make a No. 1 wife (as John Chinaman says), and I expect she and I would get on like a house on fire. Ask her if she'll come out and marry me!' There! what do you think of that? You can't say you have never had a proposal now!" and she laughed as she laid the letter on the seat and stooped to pick up her parasol, which had fallen on the grass. A sudden change swept over her friend's features, and as Jacquetta looked up, she saw that Bernice's

thoughts were far away, her eyes were fixed on vacancy.

“A penny for your thoughts! What are you thinking of, Bernice? I am sure they were miles away.”

“So they were, miles and miles away, with your brother in Hong Kong. Write to him at once, Jac, and tell him I thank him for his message, and that I say, Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“That I will come out and marry him.”

“What a good joke! How he will laugh!”

“It is not a joke. I mean it, I shall go out and marry him,” and the seriousness of her voice and manner made Jacquetta grave as well.

“Bernice, dear, you couldn’t. He does not really mean it, and if he did, you couldn’t go out and marry a man you don’t know and have never seen.”

“I have not seen him, but I know him quite well. And he ought not to send such a message to any girl unless he means it. At any rate, I *can* do it, and I shall.”

“You are a strange creature, and I am never quite sure what you may, or may not do. But in this instance I know you must be only saying it in fun.”

“I am more in earnest than I ever was in my life. You know at school I had the reputation for being the most obstinate pupil in the class, and that when I made up my mind nothing would change me. Ah, Jac, if you knew what my life is

at home, you would understand that having the chance to leave it, it would take a great deal to deter me from making the attempt. I shall write to your brother and say I'm coming, and if he does not like me, he can send me back again. At least I shall have seen a little more of the world than is possible from the circumscribed limits of Low-bridge. And now I must go and pack up. Don't stare at me as though I were some anomalous and wonderful creature. You have always loved me as a friend. Can't you contemplate me as a possible sister-in-law?"

"Indeed I can't, Bernie. And I don't believe you'll do it, in spite of what you say. Let me come and help you, and we won't talk about this any more just now."

An hour or two later Jacquetta Crookenden had almost forgotten their topic of conversation; but, as she drove to the railway station, Bernice's mind was full of the message which she had determined should be the beginning of a new life for her, and when she reached the end of her journey, she was still considering how she could succeed in carrying out her purpose.

CHAPTER II

THE main street in Hong Kong was crowded with passengers going to and fro, an endless string of jinrikshas followed each other in one continuous stream towards the European side of the town, and coolies with chairs hoisted on their shoulders, hurried along towards a par-

ticular turning of the road. There was an afternoon reception at Government House, and towards that point everybody who was anybody, was being conveyed.

In a little nook shaded by evergreens, at some distance from the entrance to the house, a lady stood surrounded by a group of men, who were all laughing heartily at something she had just said. She was of medium height, with the brown hair and dark blue eyes which proclaimed her Irish nationality, though a slight Yankee accent varied the flavour of the brogue, and betrayed her American bringing up. She was fashionably dressed, and her whole appearance was attractive, whilst the number of her admirers showed her to be a special favourite. A little way apart stood a tall good-looking young fellow, whose eyes had caught the same gleam of turquoise we have seen in Jacquetta Crookenden's; and various other people were standing and sitting about the garden, or strolling in couples up and down.

"Ah, there's Captain Crookenden. Do come here, and tell me if I can't do as I wish."

"Of course you must always do as you wish. Who says 'can't' to you, Mrs. Weston?" and as he approached nearer, two men stepped a little aside to make room for him in the circle.

"I want to go to the Fancy Ball on Friday as 'Erin,' dressed in white satin with shamrock bouquets in my hair, and all over me."

"Well, that depends entirely on your milliner, doesn't it?"

“Oh, that’s not all. I was riding round the other side of the Island this morning, and I saw the loveliest little pig you ever beheld. Now to make my dress complete, I want that little pig. I’ll take it with me in my chair to the Town Hall, and lead it into the ball-room with a string out of it, and I think it would be just sweet, don’t you? But they say I can’t do it, that the Master of Ceremonies won’t let me in if I bring a wild animal attached by a string.”

“Well, I am rather inclined to agree that they might make the pig a difficulty. No doubt, as you say, it would add to the completeness of your costume, but what would you do with it while you’re dancing? It would be a little in the way then, wouldn’t it?”

“Sure I’d make Tom hold the creature. He doesn’t dance, so it would give him something to do, much better for him than playing whist all the evening, smoking more than is good for him, and drinking whiskies and sodas *ad lib.*”

“Hard lines on Tom,” said another man, whilst they all joined again in the laugh her suggestion had called forth.

“I tell you what it is, Mrs. Weston, if you have the pluck to bring piggie to the ball, I promise you to be on the spot and proud to hold it while you’re dancing.”

“Pluck! is it Mr. Bernall? I’m not afraid of anything—unless it’s a mouse runs under my chair. I was only real frightened once in my life, and I’ll tell you when. We were on board ship

coming out, and half way between Aden and Colombo if they didn't sound the fire alarm in the middle of the night. I was sleeping in a cabin with two other women, who jumped out of their berths and ran upstairs on deck like lamplighters. But I never stirred, for I knew if there was danger Tom would come for me. And sure enough he did. 'Get up and dress as fast as you can,' he said. 'Don't stop to get your valuables, the ship's on fire.' I *was* scared, I tell you, so that I hardly knew what I was doing. 'For God's sake, Tom,' I said, 'tell me what garment I generally put on first.' And after all it was nothing but some sacks smouldering in the engine room, so we need not have been in such a hurry after all. But, oh dear, I'm tired talking, and it makes one thirsty. Captain Crookenden, take me to the refreshment room to get some tea," and she rose, and turning, they walked away slowly side by side. Then her manner changed.

"What's wrong with you? I can see you're not yourself to-day. You can't deceive *me*."

"I wanted to talk to you, to ask you to help me, to give me some advice. I'm in a horrid hole, and I don't see how I'm to get out of it."

"Been putting all your money on the wrong pony again, is that it? Tom told me 'Fury' wasn't in it, but I thought you—"

"It isn't money, I wish it were. That would be easier. You've always been such a good friend to me, Mrs. Weston, that I know you'll see me through this, if you can. But I can't tell you

about it here. When may I come to see you?"

"To-night. Let me see, Tom has to go out after dinner, but that won't matter. He's extra busy just now, as it gets nearer the end of the year he always has accounts to settle up, and so he works at office for an hour or so in the evenings. But come and dine at any rate."

* * * * *

"Captain Crookenden," announced the dignified and silk-coated Chinese butler, as our friend advanced into the room. A tall grey-haired man about fifty years of age was standing on the hearth rug, in the favourite attitude of all Englishmen at that season of the year, when a small fire burning in the grate becomes pleasant and comforting, even in the tropics.

"Glad to see you. The wife will be here directly, she came in rather late from Government House and sat talking to me afterwards. I hear you are in some bother, and want her to help you out of it. Well, Norah will give you plenty of sympathy even though she can't give you good advice, perhaps."

"Yes, that is why I came to her. But I want you to hear about it too. You're a man of the world, Weston, and I should like to know what you think I ought to do."

Just then Mrs. Weston came down, and they went in to dinner, where the presence of the silent but attentive domestic made discussion on any but local topics impossible. At last the decanters were on the table, and the servant left the room.

“ Now, Crookenden, I can give you ten minutes before I start for my evening’s work. Let us hear your trouble, and see if we can mend it.”

Then Bruce Crookenden told them briefly of his correspondence with his sister, of her repeated allusions to her friend Bernice Harrington ; and, after seeing her photograph, how he had jokingly sent her a proposal of marriage, when, to his dismay, he had been taken at his word.

“ Do you mean to tell me that she is coming ? Actually on the way ? Is that so ?

For reply he handed her a letter, and she read aloud as follows :

“ Dear Capt. Crookenden,

Your sister has conveyed to me your message. I take it seriously, as I suppose it was meant, and I write to say that I accept your offer, and am coming out. Perhaps you feel as I do, that although you have never seen me you know me very well, and if you are like Jacquetta we are sure to get on all right together, as she and I are such great friends. I have told my mother of your proposal, and she has consented to provide me with the necessary outfit, and I shall leave England by the outward P. and O. Steamer *Cathay* which should arrive in Hong Kong about a fortnight after you receive this letter, I hope this will give you sufficient time to make arrangements for my reception.

Yours ever,

BERNICE HARRINGTON.”

Mrs. Weston put down the letter without a word, but her husband exclaimed loudly, "It's absurd! It's monstrous! Do you mean to say she's never even seen you?"

"Never. I am going to marry a woman who is more absolutely a stranger to me than half the girls in Hong Kong."

"Going to marry! Stuff and nonsense! Do nothing of the sort. You can catch her at Singapore. Send her a telegram and tell her to go home again."

"How could I? Surely that would be a base thing to do, after asking the girl to come. The days of chivalry are indeed a thing of the past if it were possible for any man to treat a girl like that."

"Chivalry! Fiddle! New women must be treated with new ways. If you let her come here and marry her, she'll be miserable and she'll make you the same. Send her back, I say. Tell her plainly you won't have her."

"How can I send her back? I'm always short of cash, as you know, and I couldn't find the money at a minute's notice for her passage—nor, I expect, could she. No, I am afraid there's no help for it, and that, *nolens volens*, I must go through with it. It seems the only thing to be done."

"Look here, old fellow, I'll lend you the money for her passage myself, if you'll only do as I advise. I can't stay to talk now, but think it over, and if you decide on the telegram, let me know in the morning, and I'll wire the amount to Singapore. If you're wise you'll send her back!" and

rising, he left the room. Mrs. Weston also rose and passed into the drawing-room, followed by Bruce Crookenden.

“Sit down,” and she drew a chair close to the fireplace, and pointed to one near her for him. “Now I have a suggestion to make. Tom is a dear, good man, but, like the rest of his sex, he rushes to a fixed conclusion at once, and says ‘send her back.’ I say, temporise. Take time to consider. While you have been talking, I have been thinking, and this is the result. There is no combating the fact that you have asked the girl to come, and that she has taken you at your word. She has probably told her people and friends that it was a genuine proposal, and it would be desperately humiliating if she were to have to turn back before her voyage was completed, and appear among them again with no reason to give for such an unusual proceeding. I think you are right, and that now she has come half way, she must come on to Hong Kong. Suppose we give it out that I know her, that she is coming on a visit to me. You can go and meet her—for me, you understand—and bring her up here, and I will take her round, and she can stay as long as you please with me. Then, if you can really like her at all, well and good, it may not turn out so badly after all. But if she is impossible to you, you must let me talk to her and reason with her, and Tom must give her the money to pay her passage home again. There would be no help for it then, she *must* go back ; and if she has a grain of

common sense, she'll fall into our view of the subject, and do as I have said without raising any foolish objections. What do you say to my plan?"

"Say! What can I say, except that you are my good Samaritan, as you always are to any poor devil in trouble of any kind. I really don't know how to thank you. If she may come to you, it solves half the difficulty at once, it will stop people talking and set my mind at ease."

"Then so let it be. You shall go and meet her and explain everything. I won't go with you, because she might resent my interference, as she knows nothing about me yet. But bring her up here, and I shall soon win her confidence. I never met the woman yet that I couldn't get on with if I chose."

"What will your husband say to this idea?"

"Tom? Oh, he'll say as he always does, please yourself and you'll please me."

CHAPTER III

A ROOM in all the disorder of unpacking, open boxes deposited in various corners of it, from which their contents had been disgorged and were lying about, some on the floor, others scattered on chairs and tables. On the bed, seated side by side, Mrs. Weston and Bernice Harrington; a different Bernice from the girl we saw last in the garden in South Wales; that one was despondent, gloomy and melancholy in appearance; this one's face was

bright and vivacious, tanned with the healthy brown of a long sea voyage, and altogether a great improvement on the former edition of herself.

“ I dare say, Mrs. Weston, you think me guilty of the grossest effrontery in coming out like this to marry Bruce Crookenden, for if you are such a friend of his as I hear you are, of course you know all the story. And I am sure there isn't another girl in a thousand who would have done it. But desperate cases need desperate remedies, and my case was desperate. I am here, and I mean to stay here. But I am not yet certain that I shall marry him after all.”

“ I was nearly saying I hope you won't. But that would be hardly kind, would it? What I want to say is that Bruce Crookenden is a great friend of mine, and I should be sorry to see him unhappily married, and you see you know nothing of one another. But sometimes those who care least beforehand, get on best afterwards. But why do you say you're not certain? ”

“ Well, it's just this, I am very fond of his sister, and I wouldn't grieve or disappoint her for anything. And she made me promise before I left home, that if I saw Bruce couldn't care for me, I'd stop at the last minute, and I shall keep my promise. I have told Captain Crookenden so, and if he can't feel he cares for me at all, why I'll stay here a week or two and find something to do. I shan't go back again, of that I'm quite determined. You have lots of friends here, Mrs. Weston, and you will help me I'm sure. I am not too proud to

earn my living, and I could go out as a nurse, or governess or something, it does not matter what."

"You'll forgive me, Miss Harrington, if I say I think you're the most extraordinary girl I ever met. But if you mean it, let me say I hope you'll stay here as long as ever you choose, and I shall be pleased to have you as a guest, I can assure you."

So it was settled, the days passed rapidly enough, until a fortnight had flown by; the engaged couple went about a good deal and were seen everywhere together, and at last it was announced that the marriage was fixed to take place from Mrs. Weston's on a definite date. But Captain Crookenden did not take Mrs. Weston into his confidence respecting his feelings towards the woman he was about to wed, and Bernice was equally reserved, so that her hostess did not know why she had at last decided on carrying out the intention with which she had left England. The evening before the wedding day, Mrs. Weston went alone to a small dance given by a mutual friend, and sitting out in the interval between two waltzes with Bruce Crookenden, she broached the subject.

"Miss Harrington would not come with me this evening, said she was tired."

"She is a strange girl, but I have come to the conclusion that we shall get on all right. She is clever and good-looking, and has been brought up in a home where she has learnt economy I should say, which is important, as I can't live on my pay,

and even with the allowance my old dad gives me, I find it no easy matter to get along. I dare say we shall do well enough, at any rate I have never seen any other woman I liked better, which is in our favour. I can't realise I'm to be tied up to-morrow, it seems, even with this fortnight's grace, 'so suddint-like,' as they say."

"I like her, and I think she'll be a thorough good wife to you, if you give her half a chance. I've watched her, and I'm not easily deceived. You may take my word for it, she's fond of you already—aye, more than fond, she's in love with you. Treat her well, Captain Crookenden, and I'll answer for it, you won't be sorry that you have married her. I say treat her well, because you know you're not all like my Tom. He is a jewel of a husband, but those like him are few and far to seek. You're going up to Paradise Cottage, I hear."

"Yes, only for a day or two for the sake of appearances. I am not keen on a long honeymoon under the circumstances."

"I think I've been truly unselfish about this. I do so hate losing my bachelor friends, and one always does lose them when they marry. But as I am going away in a month or so, I shan't have to repine long."

"Going away! What shall we all do without you. Where are you going?"

"Home—that is to England, which isn't home to me. But Tom needs a holiday, and has got a

man coming to take his work for a year, so we shall be off."

"I'm so sorry. The regiment will probable be leaving before you return, so I don't know when we shall meet again. And I shall miss you dreadfully."

"I like to be missed. But it's late and I must go, or I shall look a wreck to-morrow. Good-night, and good luck to you," and with a quick hand pressure she was gone.

CHAPTER IV

SIX months had passed since Bernice Crookenden's short honeymoon, after which she had taken up her residence in quarters provided for them in barracks. These had the advantage of being rent free, which, with their limited means was a consideration, and she had made her rooms quite cosy and comfortable, and had arranged them most artistically, being gifted with more than the average amount of taste. The interest of furnishing and the newness of her surroundings had fully occupied her at first, and distracted her thoughts from a trouble which had begun to grow in her mind, and which lately seemed to have become an ever present torture to her. She loved her husband passionately and devotedly, but alas, she realised he did not reciprocate her affection, for although always polite and attentive to her, his manner was distinctly cold, and she knew that she held no real place in his affections, and that so far

as she was concerned, his heart was dead. Perhaps, if she had appealed to him and told him how much his indifference pained her, she might have awakened in him some warmer feeling, but the circumstances of her marriage came continually before her, and her pride would not let her speak the words which might have influenced him. While Mrs. Weston remained in Hong Kong, Bernice had been a little jealous of her husband's unmistakable preference for her society, and this had occasioned a sort of reserve between them, which was unfortunate, not only because it tended to keep him aloof from her, but also because it prevented her cementing a friendship with a woman who would have been a staunch ally, if she had not kept her at arm's length. Then the Westons left for England ; Bruce Crookenden missing the pleasure of their society, went more frequently to the Club and Mess, and became more and more taken up with card playing, horse racing, and other amusements. Mrs. Crookenden was not popular socially ; she had lost the happy look she had brought with her from home, and had once more relapsed into despondency, so that people were afraid of her constrained and stand-off manner, and left her a good deal to herself. One man, Mr. Bernall, a gay bachelor of a certain age, was inclined to hang about her, but she did not much appreciate his attentions ; in fact, when he did not irritate her, he generally bored her exceedingly.

One evening she was sitting alone in her

drawing-room. The night was hot, and she had all the windows wide open to catch every breath of air, and was idly looking out over the harbour, thinking sadly whether she should endure her life much longer as it was. Bruce was dining at Mess, as he did so often now, and she had been trying to read to keep her mind from dwelling on her loneliness, but had put down the book, as she found her eyes travelling up and down the page, without grasping the meaning of its contents.

A quick step on the stairs made her start and her heart beat faster. Had Bruce returned early for once? But no, that was not his footstep she was sure. The door opened and Mr. Bernall came in.

"May I be admitted so late, Mrs. Crookenden?"

"I am alone, Mr. Bernall. Did you want my husband? You will find him at the Mess."

"Yes, I know, I have just come from there, I did not want to see him, I came to see you."

"Indeed? Why?"

"For no special reason. I thought—well, I thought it must be deuced dull for you all by yourself night after night, and so perhaps you'd be glad to see some one—to see even me."

This he said with a certain amount of hesitation, as he saw the expression of her face change slowly from surprise, to something very like vexation.

"I suppose it would not occur to you that occasionally one may prefer solitude, that one would rather be alone."

“ Oh, come now, Mrs. Crookenden, *occasionally* you say. It strikes me it is not occasionally, but frequently—one might almost say *always* in your case, don't you think ! ”

“ And even if it were always, what then ? ”

“ Why, then perhaps you would let me come and spend an hour or two with you, just to cheer you up, you know. We all know how Crookenden leaves you and neglects you, and—”

She rose suddenly from the sofa on which she had been sitting, and with her eyes flashing she turned on him.

“ Stop, Mr. Bernall. I do not criticise my husband's actions, and I will not permit you, nor any one, to do so in my presence. I dare say you mean well in coming here this evening, but you have made a mistake. You will pardon me if I ask you to be so kind as to go. I am very tired, and I prefer to be alone,” and with an imperious gesture, she held out her hand to him. He took it and held it for a second, then hastily raising it to his lips, and dropping it as quickly, somewhat crushed and crestfallen, he retreated from the room, and she heard him slowly going downstairs. Then with a low cry she flung herself on her knees beside the sofa, and burying her face in the cushions sobbed as though her heart would break. “ Oh, Bruce, my husband, I cannot bear it ! To think that I have come to this ! ” All the pent up anguish of the last few weeks seemed to have broken out and overwhelmed her, and she cried till she was exhausted. She was still lying there,

when about midnight her husband came into the room, and he started as he saw her prostrate figure.

“What on earth are you doing, Bernice, lying on the floor? Why aren't you in bed at this hour?”

She rose without a word, and sitting down on the sofa, looked him steadily in the face. Then he perceived that hers was tear-stained, and that something had evidently occurred to disturb and distress her.

“I waited for you, I couldn't go to bed until I had spoken to you, Bruce, I want to leave here, I have made up my mind to go home.”

“And may I ask the reason of this determination? It seems a strange thing that you should arrive at this decision so suddenly, and that you should take so unexpected and unusual a moment to inform me of your wishes.”

“Yes, I knew you would not understand. I can't help that, and I would rather not explain. But I really want to go, and I felt I must settle it to-night.”

“Good Heavens! Bernice, one would think by the way you talk that going home was as easy as crossing the harbour. Will you tell me, pray, where the money is to come from to pay your passage? I haven't a cent to give you, you must know that.”

“Never mind about the money, I shall find a way. Only say I may go.”

“Go? Of course you can go. It will make no

difference to me. Only you can't expect me to send you supplies, as I am not in a position to do that, with exchange falling lower every day. But it's too late to discuss the question now. I have to be on the course first thing in the morning. To-morrow we can talk about it, if you wish," and nodding a good-night to her, he went to his own room.

A week later Bernice had made all arrangements for her departure. She had heard of a lady leaving for England with several children, who had advertised for someone to give their assistance on the voyage in exchange for a free passage home, and she easily persuaded her husband that this would be a suitable arrangement by which she could get away from Hong Kong. He seemed relieved to find that she had acted on her own responsibility, and was still bent on carrying out her plan.

He was out all day and every day, for when not on duty he spent all his time training a pony for a polo match which was coming off shortly, and in preparing for a gymkhana which had been fixed for an early date. In all these pastimes he was always well to the fore, being a good rider and accustomed to horses all his life.

Many times during that last week Bernice's heart failed her. Could she bear to go, putting so many thousands of miles of sea between her and the being she loved best on earth, with the possibility of never seeing him again, and the absolute uncertainty of what she could do when she reached

England. She must earn a living somehow, her husband had told her plainly he could not remit money to her, and that if she left him he could not afford to give her anything out of his pay. But whenever she was tempted to relinquish her intention, the recollection of what Mr. Bernall had said came back again, and filled her mind with bitterness. She was a despised and neglected wife, they all knew her story, and doubtless they held her in contempt and derision. If Bruce had ever shown her the slightest sign of affection or tenderness, she would have stayed and tried to win his love. But it was no use ; he was so cold, he would never care for her, never, and she could not bear to live thus with him, so near and yet so far.

He came to the steamer with her to see her off.

“Don’t blame me, Bernice, if this turns out badly. You are leaving of your own choice, not by my wish. When you get home, go and stay with Jacquetta, and she will advise you what to do. I have written to her about you.”

Till this last moment her pride had kept her steady, but as the bell rang to warn the residents to go on shore, the tears rose to her eyes, and she took his hand in hers and would not let it go, while, struggling with her emotion, she tried to command her voice.

“I have not told you why I am going, Bruce, but I will tell you now. You must not stay—yes, I know—but listen for one second. I love you, Bruce, with all my soul, good-bye,” and without a backward glance she passed swiftly along the deck

and disappeared down the companion, and he hurried towards the gangway, a sudden feeling of self-reproach dawning upon him, as he remembered Mrs. Weston's words, "Treat her well, and you won't be sorry you have married her." Had he done so? He feared not quite; in the letter, perhaps, but not in the spirit.

* * * * *

The P. and O. mail steamer had just come alongside the wharf in Singapore, and the agent (the first to go on board) approached the captain holding an envelope in his hand.

"Have you a Mrs. Crookenden on board?"

"Yes, second-class passenger, looking after Mrs. Hall's children."

"A telegram for her. I brought it on at once."

"Here, steward, take this to Mrs. Crookenden."

Another moment and Bernice received the missive, and exclaiming "A telegram for me!" she tore it open, "Polo accident; Crookenden badly hurt. Bernall."

The colour left her face, and she sank down on a chair near her, speechless and faint.

But it was only a momentary weakness. In another instant she had formed a resolve, and immediately set about carrying it out. She went to Mrs. Hall.

"I am very sorry, I cannot go on with you. I must go back to Hong Kong. My husband has been hurt, and he will want me."

"It's quite impossible, Mrs. Crookenden, that you can leave me like this. You arranged to

come with me, and you must do so. What am I to do with the children without you, I should like to know?"

"You will get someone to take my place in Singapore. I cannot help it, Mrs. Hall. I *must* go back, and I shall do so."

She drove straight to the office to make enquiries as to how soon she could get a steamer going eastward, and to her relief found that the outward mail was expected the following day, and she arranged at once for a berth on board of it.

Then she had to wait patiently through all those anxious and lonely hours in the hotel, tormented by remorse that she had left him, and by fears that she might be too late. And when the ship arrived, and after the usual delay in port, she found herself retracing the pathway over the ocean which she had traversed so short a time before, her suspense and grief seemed almost too great for her to bear.

At last the long hours dragged slowly by, and the five days' voyage came to an end, and the morning of the sixth saw her entering the harbour, at which she had arrived less than a twelvemonth before, full of happy anticipation for the future, so different from her present sorrow of mind. Almost as soon as the ship came to anchor, Mr. Bernall was on board.

"I thought you would come back. I was right to wire you, was I not?"

"What news, Mr. Bernall? Is he dead?"

"No, no, not dead, though we thought at first

it was all up with him. It was a ghastly fall, and the pony kicked him on the head, knocked his senses out of him for a couple of days, and made an ugly gash. But he is conscious now, and the wound will heal. The worst part of the business is his foot, literally smashed, not a bone in it that is not broken, and the doctors fear that he must lose it."

"Oh, don't say so. Bruce lame for life! It would be too cruel. He has always been so active, he could not bear it. It would break his heart, I'm sure. I pray it may not be as bad as that." All the while she talked, they had been getting on shore, and having arrived there she said:

"Where is he? At our quarters?"

"He is in hospital. Will you come straight there?"

"Yes, please take me to him now, at once."

The greatest shock for her was yet to come, and when about to enter the room in which he lay, for a second she drew back behind the door, and clung to Mr. Bernall's arm, a deadly faintness creeping over her.

Her husband lay on a small bed, so changed she would hardly have known him, especially as a large bandage covered part of his face, the rest of it being disfigured by strips of plaster, and so many bruises that it was quite unrecognisable. He moaned as if in pain, and muttered to himself.

"Don't go in if you can't stand it, Mrs. Crookenden. He does not know that you are coming, so I had better tell him first."

“I shall be all right directly. But you said that he was conscious, why does he keep on talking like that?”

“He knows us when we speak to him. He is partly sensible, but, of course, his brain won't get over a knock of that sort all at once. Let me speak to him.”

“Crookenden?”

“Hullo! Who's calling me?”

“It's I, Bernall. You know me. I've brought your wife to see you.”

“Wife! She's in England, old fellow, went away ages ago—because, because—”

“I'm here, Bruce, my husband. I have come back to you. I will take care of you,” and she knelt down beside him, and pressed her lips on the fevered hand flung out on the bed. He drew it away and passed it over her head. Then said gently:

“Bernice! It's a bad business. Blind and lame. You'll have a cripple for your husband, do you know that?”

“Ah no, dear, not so bad as that. When they take away that ugly bandage, you won't be blind. And the foot—perhaps it may get well.”

“They want to take it off. I think I'd almost sooner die. Who'd care for a poor devil of a cripple, I should like to know.”

“I should care for you always, for ever, Bruce. I shall love you till I die.”

CHAPTER V

THE days have passed into weeks, and the weeks into months, and again the end of September is drawing near ; once more we are back in the same garden where Bernice and Jacquetta Crookenden had sat together at that time last year. Now Jacquetta has a different companion, no other than our friend Mrs. Weston, with whom she is chatting, seated under the shade of the big tree, on the same rustic bench as that on which the two girls had sat before.

“ It is so nice that you were able to come to us, for I knew Bruce would be so glad to see you. He told us how awfully good both of you were to him out in Hong Kong. Don't you think it is wonderful his marriage has turned out so well ? He seems devoted to her.”

“ Indeed he does, but so he ought, for I hear that she nursed him night and day after his accident, and never left his side for a moment. And the doctors were all for taking off his foot, but she stood out about it and wouldn't have it done, for she said he might just as well be dead as crippled. And she just wouldn't let them. She looks pale, and little wonder ; but you should have seen her when she arrived out in Hong Kong. She had a lovely fresh colour then, and looked quite handsome. It's remarkable what a difference a little colour makes in some faces—but I don't agree with putting it on, if it isn't there naturally. I tried it once, when I was in America, before I was married.

I was going to a party where I wanted to create a sensation and have a good time. I did the first, but not the second. For when I appeared with my rosy cheeks (I was generally so pale at other times), my friends thought I had a fever, and fled from me in all directions as quick as ever they could. But here comes Tom with your dad, shall we go and meet them?" and they rose and strolled away together. A few minutes afterwards two figures appeared from the shrubbery at the farther end of the garden, and came slowly towards the seat they had vacated, Bruce Crookenden and his wife. With one arm he lent heavily upon her, while with the other hand he grasped a stick which supported him as he limped along, and as he relinquished his hold and sat down, she said :

"There ! You have walked quite a long way without your crutches. Another week or two and you will throw them away, and before long you'll walk as well as ever you did. You won't want me any more then."

He passed his arm round her, and drawing her down beside him, he pressed his lips to hers, saying, "My darling, how could I do without you ? I shall want you all my life."



